



THE GUERRILLA CHIEF



BY
CAPTAIN
MAYNE REID



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THE GUERILLA CHIEF



SILENT AND MELANCHOLY WE STOOD UPON THE NOW DESERTED
WHARF.

Front. The Guerilla Chief.

[p. 213]

THE
GUERRILLA CHIEF
AND OTHER TALES

BY
CAPTAIN MAYNE REID

AUTHOR OF "THE RIFLE RANGERS" AND "THE SCALP HUNTERS"



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THE GUERILLA CHIEF.

CHAPTER I.

CERRO GORDO.

“AGUA! *por amor Dios, agua—aguita!*” (Water! for the love of God, a little water!)

I heard these words, as I lay in my tent, on the field of Cerro Gordo.

It was the night after the battle bearing this name—fought between the American and Mexican armies in the month of April, 1847.

The routed regiments of Santa Anna—saving some four thousand men captured upon the ground—had sought safety in flight, the greater body taking the main road to Jalapa, pursued by our victorious troops; while a large number, having sprawled down the almost perpendicular cliff that overhangs the “Rio del Plan” escaped, unperceived and unpursued, into the wild chapparals that cover the *piedmont* of Peroté.

Among these last was the *lamé* tyrant himself, or rather should I say, *at their head leading the retreat*. This has always been his favourite position at the close of a battle that has gone against him; and a score of such defeats can be recorded.

I could have captured him on that day but for the cowardice of a colonel who had command over me and mine. I alone, of all the American army, saw Santa Anna making his escape from the field, and in such a direction that I could without difficulty have intercepted his retreat. With the strength of a corporal's guard, I could have taken both him and his glittering staff; but even this number of men was denied me, and *nolens volens* was I constrained to forego the pleasure of taking prisoner this truculent tyrant, and hanging him to the nearest tree, which, as God is my judge, I should most certainly have done. Through the imbecility of my superior officer, I lost the chance of a triumph calculated to have given me considerable fame; while Mexico missed finding an avenger.

Strictly speaking, I was not *in* the engagement of Cerro Gordo. My orders on that day—or rather those of the spruce colonel who commanded me—were to guard a battery of mountain howitzers, that had been dragged to the top of the cliff overlooking El plan—not that already mentioned as the field of battle, and which was occupied by the enemy, but the equally precipitous height on the opposite side of the river.

From early daylight until the Mexicans gave way, we kept firing at them across the stupendous chasm that lay between us, doing them no great damage, unless they were frightened by the whizz of an occasional rocket, which our artillerist, Ripley—now a second-rate Secesh general—succeeded in sending into their midst.

As to ourselves and the battery, there was no more danger of either being assaulted by the enemy than there was of our being whisked over the cliff by the tail of a comet. There was not a Mexican soldier on our side of the *barranca*; and as to any of them crossing over to us,

they could only have performed the feat in a balloon, or by making a circuitous march of nearly a dozen miles.

For all this security, our stick-to-the-text colonel held close to the little battery of howitzers; and would not have moved ten paces from it to have accomplished the capture of the whole Mexican army.

Perfectly satisfied, from the "lights with which we had been furnished," that there was no danger to our battery, and chafing at the ill-luck that had placed me so far away from the ground where laurels were growing, and where others were in the act of reaping them, I lost all interest in Ripley and his popguns; and straying along the summit of the cliff, I sat me down upon its edge.

A yucca stood stiffly out from the brow of the precipice. It was the tree-yucca, and a huge bole of bayonet-shaped leaves crowning its corrugated trunk shaded a spot of grass-covered turf, on the very edge of the escarpment.

Had I not scaled the Andes, I might have hesitated to trust myself under the shadow of that tree. But a cliff, however sheer and stupendous, could no longer cause a whirl in my brain; and to escape from the rays of a tropical sun, at that moment in mid-heaven, I crept forward, caught hold of the stem of the yucca, lowered my extremities, all booted and spurred as they were, over the angle of the porphyritic rock, took a Havana out of my case, drew a fusee across the steel-filings, and, having ignited the cigar, I commenced watching the deadly strife then raging in full fury on the opposite side of the ravine.

The prudent *nawab*, who preferred looking at a tiger-hunt out of a two-storey window, or the spectator of a bull-fight in the upper tier of a "plaza de toros," could not have been safer than I, since, without running the slightest risk, I had a "bird's-eye view" of the battle.

I could see the steady advance of Worth's division of regulars, supported by the fiery squadrons of Harney's Horse; the brigade of Twiggs—that hoary-headed sexagenarian *bavard*, since distinguished as the “traitor of Texas;” the close-lined and magnificently-mounted troop of dragoons with horses of light gray, led by Phil. Kearney—Kearney, the accomplished gentleman—the best cavalry officer America ever produced; the dashing, daring Phil. Kearney, who, under my own eyes, lost his right arm in the *garita* of San Antonio de Abad; the lamented Phil. Kearney, since become a victim to the accursed Secesh rebellion, or rather to the mismanagement of that wooden-headed pretender whose stolid “strategy” ignorance still continues to mistake for genius—M'Clellan.

I saw them, one and all, regulars and volunteers, horse and foot, move at the “forward.” I saw them advance towards the hill “El Telegrafo.” I saw them mending their pace to the double-quick, and break into a run at the “charge!”

I could hear the charging signal and the cheer that succeeded it. I could see the base of the hill suddenly empurpled with smoke—a belt of conglomerate puffs rapidly merging into one another. I could perceive the opposing puffs upon the summit, growing thinner and thinner, as the blue mantle below *caped* gradually up towards the shoulder of the “cerro.”

Then the smoke upon the summit became dissolved into translucent vapour; the tricoloured Mexican flag flickered for a moment longer through its film, until, as if by some invisible hand, it was dragged down the staff; while at the same instant the banner of the stars and stripes swept out upon the breeze, announcing the termination of the battle of Cerro Gordo.

CHAPTER II.

THE ESCAPE OF EL COJO.

DESPITE the chagrin I felt at being literally *hors de combat*, I could not at this moment avoid surrendering myself to a feeling of exultation.

Both my chagrin and exultation were suddenly checked. A spectacle was before my eyes that inspired me with a vivid hope—a dream of glory.

Like a string of white ants descending the side of one of their steepest “hills,” I perceived a long line moving down the face of the opposite cliff. In the distance—a mile or more—they looked no larger than *termites*. Like them, too, they were of whitish colour. For all that, I knew they were men—soldiers in the cheap cotton uniforms of the Mexican infantry.

Without any strain upon my powers of ratiocination, I divined that they were fugitives from the field above, who, in their panic, had retreated over the precipice—anywhere that promised to separate them from their victorious foemen.

The moving line was not straight up and down the cliff, but zigzagged along its face. I could tell there was a path.

At its lower end, and already down near the “plan” of the river (Plan del Rio), I perceived a group of men, dressed in dark uniforms. There were points on the more sombre background of their vestments that kept constantly scintillating in the sun. These were gold or gilt buttons, epaulettes, steel scabbards of sabres, or bands of lace.

It was easy to tell that the individuals thus adorned were officers, notwithstanding the fact that, as officers, they were at the *wrong* end of the retreating line.

I carried a lorgnette, which I had already taken out of its case. I directed it towards the opposite side of the ravine, upon the dark head of that huge caterpillar sinuously descending the cliff.

I could distinguish the individuals of this group. One was receiving attentions from the rest—even assistance. The Mexican Cæsar was easily recognized. His halting gait, as he descended the sloping path, or swung himself from ledge to ledge, betrayed the cork leg of *El Cojo*.

A mule stood ready saddled at the bottom of the precipice. I saw Santa Anna descend and approach it. I saw him, aided by others, mount in the saddle. I saw him ride off, followed by a disordered crowd of frightened fugitives, who, on reaching the chapparal, took to their heels with the instinct of *saue qui peut*.

I looked up the valley of the river. It was enclosed by precipitous "bluffs," as far as the eye could reach; but on that side where we had planted our battery—scarce a mile above our position—a line of black heavy timber told me there was a lateral ravine leading outwards in the direction of Orizava. The retreating troops of Santa Anna must either find exit by this ravine, keep on up the stream, or risk running back into the teeth of their pursuers on the opposite side of the river.

I hurried back to the battery, and reported what I had seen. I could have made my colonel a general—a hero—had he been of the right stuff.

"'Tis an easy game, colonel; we have only to intercept them at the head of yonder dark line of timber. We can be there before them!"

"Nonsense, captain! We have orders to guard this battery. We must not leave it."

"May I take my own men?"

"No ! not a man must be taken away from the guns."

"Give me fifty !"

"I cannot spare them."

"Give me twenty ; I shall bring Santa Anna back here in less than an hour."

"Impossible ! There are thousands with him. We shall be lucky if they don't turn this way. There are only three hundred of us, and there must be over a thousand of them."

"You refuse to give me twenty men ?"

"I can't spare a man. We may need them all, and more."

"I shall go alone."

I was half mad. The glory that might have been so easily won was placed beyond my reach by this over-cautious imbecile.

I was almost foolish enough to have flung myself over the cliff, or rushed alone into the midst of the retreating foes.

I left the battery and walked slowly away out of sight of my superior. I continued along the counterscarp of the cliff, until I had reached the edge of the lateral ravine leading out from the river valley. I crouched behind the thick tussocks of the zamias. I saw the retreating tyrant, mounted on his mule, ride past, almost within range of my rifle bullet ! I saw a thousand men crowding closely after, so utterly routed and demoralized that nothing could have induced them to stand another shot. I was convinced that my original idea was in perfect correspondence with the truth, and that with the help of a score of determined men I could have made prisoners of the whole "ruck."

Instead of this triumph, my only achievement in the battle of Cerro Gordo was to call my colonel a coward, for

which I was afterwards confined to close quarters, and only recovered the right to range abroad on the eve of a subsequent battle, when it was thought that my sword might be of more service than my condemnation by court-martial.

Of such a nature were my thoughts as I lay under canvas on the field of Cerro Gordo on the night succeeding the battle.

"Agua ! por amor Dios, agua—aguita !"

These words reaching my ear, and now a second time pronounced, broke in upon the train of my reflections.

They were not the only sounds disturbing the tranquillity of that calm tropic night. From other parts of the field, though in a different direction and more distant, I could hear many voices speaking in a similar strain, in tones of agonized appeal, low mutterings, mingled with moanings, where some mutilated foeman was struggling in the throes of death, and vainly calling for help that came not.

On that night, from the field of Cerro Gordo, many a soul soared upward to eternity—many a brave man went to sleep with unclosed eyes, a sleep from which he was never more to awaken.

In what remained of twilight after my arrival on the ground, I had visited all the wounded within the immediate vicinity of my post—all that I could find—for the field of battle was in reality a wood, or rather a thicket; and no doubt there were many who escaped my observation.

I had done what little was in the power of myself and a score of companions—soldiers of my corps—to alleviate the distress of the sufferers: for, although they were our enemies, we had not the slightest feeling of hostility towards them. There had been such in the morning, but it was

gone ere the going down of the sun, leaving only compassion in its place.

Yielding simply to the instincts of humanity, I had done my best in binding up wounds, many of them that I knew to be mortal; and only when worn out by fatigue, absolutely "done up," had I sought a tent, under the shelter of which it was necessary I should pass the night.

It was after a long spell of sleep, extending into the mid-hours of the night, that I was awakened from my slumbers, and gave way to the reflections above detailed. It was then that I heard that earnest call for water; it was then I heard the more distant voices, and mingled with them the howling bark of the coyote, and the far more terrible baying of the large Mexican wolf. In concert with such choristers, no wonder the human voices were uttered in tones especially earnest and lugubrious.

"Agua ! por amor Dios, agua, aguita !"

For the third time I listened to this piteous appeal. It surprised me a little. I thought I had placed a vessel of water within the reach of every one of the wounded wretches who lay near my tent. Had this individual been overlooked ?

Perhaps he had drunk what had been left him, and thirsted for more ? In any case, the earnest accents in which the solicitation was repeated, told me that he was thirsting with a thirst that tortured him.

I waited for another, the fourth repetition of the melancholy cry. Once more I heard it.

This time I had listened with more attention. I could perceive in the pronunciation a certain provincialism, which proclaimed the speaker a peasant, but one of a special class. The *por amor Dios*, instead of being drawled out in the whine of the regular alms-asker, was short and

slurred. It fell upon the ear as if the *a* in *amor* was omitted, and also the initial letter in *aguita*. The phrase ran:—" *Agua ! por 'mor Dios, 'gua, aguita !*"

I recognized in those abbreviations the *patois* of a peculiar people, the denizens of the coast of Vera Cruz, and the *tierra caliente*—the *Jarochos*.

The sufferer did not appear to be at any great distance from my tent—perhaps a hundred paces, or two hundred at most. I could no longer lend a deaf ear to his outcries.

I started up from my *catre*—a camp-bedstead, which my tent contained—groped, and found my canteen, not forgetting the brandy-flask, and, sallying forth into the night, commenced making my way towards the spot where I might expect to find the utterer of the earnest appeal.

CHAPTER III.

THE MENACE OF A MONSTER.

THE tent I was leaving stood in the centre of a circumscribed clearing. Ten paces from its front commenced the *chapparal*—a thicket of thorny shrubs, consisting of acacia, cactus, the agave, yuccas, and copaiva trees, mingled and linked together by lianas and vines of smilax, sarsaparilla, jalap, and the climbing bromelias. There was no path save that made by wild animals—the timid Mexican mazame and its pursuer, the cunning coyote.

One of these paths I followed.

Its windings soon led me astray. Though the moon was shining in a cloudless sky, I was soon in such a maze,

that I could neither tell the direction of the tent I had left behind, nor that of the sufferer I had sallied out in search of.

In sight there was no object to guide me. I paused in my steps, and listened for a sound.

For some seconds there was a profound silence, unbroken even by the groans of the wounded, some of whose voices were, perhaps, now silent in death. The wolves, too, had suspended their hideous howlings, as though their quest for prey had ended, and they were busily banqueting on the dead.

The stillness produced a painful effect, even more than the melancholy sounds that had preceded it. I almost longed for their renewal.

A short while only did this irksome silence continue. It was terminated by the voice I had before heard, this time in the utterance of a different speech.

"Soy moriendo ! Lola—Lolita ! a ver te nunca mas en este mundo !" (I am dying, Dolores—dear Dolores ! never more shall I see you in this world !)

"Nunca mas en este mundo !" came the words rapidly re-pronounced, but in a voice of such different intonation as to preclude the possibility of mistaking it either for an echo or repetition by the same speaker.

"No, never !" continued the second voice, in the same tone, and in a similar *patois*. "Never again shall you look upon Lola—you, Calros Vergara, who have kept me from becoming her husband ; who have poisoned her mind against me——"

"Ah ! it is you ! Rayas ! What has brought you hither ? Is it to torture a dying man ?"

"Carajo ! I didn't come to do anything of the kind. I came to assure myself that you *were* dying—that's all.

Vicente Vilagos, who has escaped from this ugly affair, has just told me you'd got a bit of lead through your body. I've sought you here to make sure that your wound was fatal—as he said it was.”

“*Santissima!* O Ramon Rayas! that is your errand?”

“You mistake—I have another: else I shouldn't have risked falling into the hands of those damnable *Americanos*, who might take a fancy to send one of their infernal bullets through my own carcass.”

“What other errand? What want you with me? I am sore wounded—I believe I am dying.”

“First, as I've told you—to make sure that you *are* dying; and secondly, if that be the case, to learn before you *do* die, what you have done with Lola.”

“Never. Dead or living, you shall not know from me. Go, go! *por amor Dios!* do not torment a poor wretch in his last moments.”

“Bah! Calros Vergara, listen to reason. Remember, we were boys together—scourged in the same school. Your time's up; you can't protect Lola any more. Why hinder me—I who love her as my own life? I'm not so bad as people say, though I am accused of an inclination for the *road*. That's the fault of the bad government we've got. Come! don't leave the world like a fool; and Lola without a protector. Tell me where you've hidden hertell me that, and the n——’

“No! no! Leave me, Rayas! leave me! If I am to die, let me die in peace.”

“You won't tell me?”

“No—no——”

“Never mind, then; I'll find out in time, and no thanks to you. So, go to the devil, and carry your secret along with you. If Lola be anywhere within the four

corners of Mexico, I'll track her up. She don't escape from Rayas the *salteador*!"

I could hear a rustling among the bushes : as if the last speaker, having delivered his *ultimatum*, was taking his departure from the spot.

Suddenly the sound ceased ; and the voice once more echoed in my ear—

"Carrambo !" exclaimed the man now known to me as Ramon Rayas, "I was going away without having accomplished the best half of my errand ! Didn't I come to make certain that your wound was mortal ? Let's see if that *picaro* Vilagos has been telling me the truth. Through what part of the body are you perforated ?"

There was no reply ; but from certain indications I could tell that the *salteador* had approached the prostrate man, and was stooping down to examine his wounds.

I made a movement forward in the direction in which I had heard the strange dialogue ; but checked myself on again hearing the voice of Rayas.

"*Carajo* !" ejaculated he, in a tone that betokened some discovery, at the same time one causing disappointment. "That wound of yours is not mortal—not a bit of it ! You may recover from it, if——"

"You think I have a chance to recover ?" eagerly interrogated the wounded man—willing to clutch at hope, even when offered by an enemy.

"*Think* you have a chance to recover ? I'm *sure* of it. The bullet has passed through your thigh—what of that ? It's only a flesh wound. The great artery is not touched. That I'm sure about, or you'd have bled to death long ago. The bone is not broken : else you could no more lift your foot in that fashion, than you could kick yonder *cofre*

from the top of Peroté. *Carrambo!* you'd be sure to get over it, if——"

There was an interval of silence, as though the speaker hesitated to pronounce the condition implied by that "if." The peculiar emphasis, placed on the monosyllabic word, told me that he was making pause for a purpose.

"If what, Capitan Rayas?"

The interrogatory came from the wounded man, in a tone trembling between hope and doubt.

"If," answered the other, and with emphatic pronunciation,—"*if you tell me where you have hidden Dolores.*"

There was a groan; and then in a quivering voice came the rejoinder.

"How could that affect my recovery? If I am to die, it could not save me. If it be my fate to survive this sad day——"

"It is *not*," interrupted the *salteador*, in a firm, loud voice. "No! This day you must die—this hour—this moment, unless you reveal to me that secret you have so carefully kept. Where is Dolores?"

"Never! Rather shall I die than that she should fall into the power of such a remorseless villain. After that threat, O God!——"

"Die, then! and go to the God you are calling upon. Die, Calros Vergara——!"

* * * * *

During the latter part of this singular dialogue, I had been worming myself through the devious alleys of the thicket, and gradually drawing nearer to the speakers. Just as the "Die, then!" reached my ears, I caught sight of the man who had pronounced the terrible menace—as well as of him to whom it was addressed.

Both were upon the other side of the little opening into

which I had entered, the latter lying prostrate upon the grass ; the former bending over him, with right arm upraised, and a long blade glittering in his grasp.

At the sight my sword leaped from its sheath, and I was about to rush forward ; when, on calculating the distance across the glade, I perceived I should be too late.

Quick as the thought I changed my weapon, dropping the sword at my feet, and drawing my revolver from its holster in my belt.

To cock the pistol, take aim, and pull the trigger, were three actions in one, the result being a crack, a flash, a cloud of smoke, a cry of commingled rage and pain ; and succeeding to these sounds, a loud breaking among the bushes on the opposite side of the opening, as if some individual was making his way through the thicket, without staying to seek for a path, and with no other thought than to put space between himself and the form still recumbent upon the sword !

The latter I knew to be Carlos, or Calros, in the patois of his *con-paisano*. The fugitive was the *salteador* so lately threatening his life.

Had the murderer succeeded in his design ? I saw his blade brandished aloft, as I drew my pistol from its holster. I had not seen the downward thrust ; but, for all that, it might have been made.

With a heart brimful of anxiety, I ran across the glade. I say brimful of anxiety : for something, I could not tell what, had excited my sympathy for Calros Vergara.

Partly may it have been from hearing that speech of sombre but significant import,—“ *Soy moriendo ! Lola !— Lolita ! a ver te nunca mas en este mundo !* ” and partly from admiration for a noble nature, that preferred even

death to the disclosing of some secret, which might compromise the welfare of his beloved Dolores.

I thought no more of the robber, or his efforts to escape. My whole attention became devoted to the man whom he had marked out for his victim ; and I made all haste to ascertain whether I had been successful in hindering his fell intent.

In a score of seconds I was standing by the side of the prostrate Jarocho, bending over his body. I held the pistol in my hand, my finger still pressing upon the trigger, just as after firing the shot that had disembarassed him of his enemy.

"Are you safe?" I inquired, in the best Mexican-Spanish I could command. "He has not succeeded in——?"

"Strike, villain ! through my heart, if you will. Ah ! Dolores ! Better my death, and yours—better far be in your grave than in the embrace of Ramon Rayas ! *O Santissima Madre !*—I die—I die ! Mother of God protect—*Lola !—Lolita ! quer-i-da herm——*"

The last phrase was pronounced in a whisper, gradually growing so indistinct that I could not make certain of the final words, though with my ear close to the lips of the speaker.

His voice was no longer heard even in whispers.

I raised my head, and looked down upon the face of Carlos Vergara. His lips moved no more. His eyes still open, and glistening under the light of the moon, seemed no longer to see, no more to mistake me for his enemy. He appeared to be dead.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ANGEL VOICE.

FOR some seconds I hung over what I supposed to be an inanimate form ; it was that of a mere youth, and fair to behold, as was also the face, which was conspicuously upturned to the light of the moon. Notwithstanding its deathly pallor, it exhibited a fine type of manly beauty. The features were regular, the complexion brown, the cheek soft and smooth, the upper lip darkly bedecked with the young growth of virility, the eye rotund and of noble expression, the forehead framed in a garland of glossy black hair, whose luxuriant curls drooped down upon each side of the full rounded throat—all these I saw at a single glance. I saw also a faultless figure, habited in the costume of a peasant rather than of a soldier, but a peasant of a peculiar people, the *Jarocho*s. In the words lately proceeding from the lips of the unfortunate youth, I had recognized the *patois* of this people, and was not surprised at seeing a richly-embroidered shirt of the finest linen, neatly fitting over the young man's breast, a sash of China crape around the waist, calzoneros of velveteen, with rows of bell-buttons, and boots with spurs attached, apparently of silver.

Striking and rich as was the costume, it was still only that of the Mexican peasant. A few peculiarities, such as the hat of palm-sinnet, and the checked kerchief, that had covered the back part of the head, both lying near, denoted their *ci-devant* wearer to be a denizen of the coast lands—in short, a “*Jarocho*.”

These observations did not detain me, or only for a second of time, as I bent down over the prostrate form.

My whole design was to examine the wound which I supposed to have been given by the robber, and which I really believed to have caused the Jarocho's death.

To my astonishment, I could discover no wound, at least none that was fresh. There was a blotch of coagulated blood on the left thigh, darker in the centre as seen through the torn calzoneros; but this was from the wound received in battle.

Where was that just given by the sword of the Salteador? Certainly I saw stains of blood recently spilt. There were several spots upon the white linen shirt, besprinkling the plaits upon the bosom, and others upon the sleeves; also the cheeks of the youth showed a drop or two on their pallid ground.

Whence had these blood-drops proceeded?

I could not guess. I could discover no recent stab on the Jarocho's body, not a scratch to account for them!

Had the robber, after all, failed in his fatal thrust? Had the death of his intended victim been caused by the shot-wound in the thigh, hastened by the terror of that horrid threat?

While thus conjecturing, my eye fell upon an object glancing through the grass. I stooped down and took it up. It was a *macheté*—half sword, half hunting-knife—to be met with in every Mexican house, or seen hanging on the hip of every Mexican *cavallero*.

Was it the weapon of the wounded man, or that I had lately seen in the hand of his enemy?

I took it up to examine it. The blade was bright: not a speck appeared on its polished surface!

Between my fingers, as they grasped the hilt of riveted horn, I felt something *wet*. Was it dew from the grass?

No. The moonlight fell upon something darker than dew. Both the haft of the weapon and my fingers encircling it were red as rubies. It was blood, and fresh from the veins of a human being!

As it could not be the blood of Calros, I concluded it must be that of Ramon Rayas. My bullet must have been true to its aim.

While thus occupied with conjectures, a new voice fell upon my ear, as different from either of those lately listened to as music from the rudest noise.

"Calros! dear Calros!" called the voice, "was it you I heard? Speak, Calros! *valga me Dios!* That shot! Surely it was not for him? No—no—I heard him speaking after it. Calros! Answer me, if you are near. It is I who call—I, your own Lola!"

Had it been the voice of an angel coming out of the chapparal, or from the sky above it could not have sounded sweeter, nor thrilled me with a stranger impulse.

For some seconds I remained irresolute as to what answer should be made to the pathetic appeal. I hesitated to apprise the speaker of the presence of Calros. Only his body was present; his spirit was not there!

What a sad spectacle for the eye of the loved Dolores—the *loving* Dolores—how could I doubt it? Looking upon the handsome Jarocho—graceful even in the attitude of death—I could not wonder at the earnestness of that feminine voice, pronouncing him her "*querido Calros.*"

Once more it fell upon my ear, continuing the passionate appeal.

"Calros! O Calros! Why do you not answer me? It is Lola—your own Lola!"

"Lola!" I responded, yielding to an irresistible emotion, "this way; come this way! Calros is here."

An exclamatory phrase, expressing gratitude to the "Mother of God," was heard in response; and quickly following the words, a female form, fair as the mother of men, parting the bushes that bordered the glade, stepped out into the opening.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNPLEASANT MISUNDERSTANDING.

YES, fair as the mother of men—it is no exaggeration to say it—was she who, answering my summons, had emerged from the shadowy chapparal, and now stood exposed to my view under the full light of the moon. It was a full moon—a Mexican moon, that delights to shine upon lovely woman; and no lovelier could its beams have ever embraced than she who now stood before me.

It was beauty of a type peculiar to the land in which I viewed it—peculiar even to a single province—the *tierra caliente*, or coast-region, of Vera Cruz.

The image of Lola is still upon the tablets of my memory, permanently impressed as I saw her at that moment; perhaps more deeply graven upon my heart as I beheld her afterwards.

The picture presented to my eye, and viewed under the moon's mellow light, was that of a girl just approaching the completeness of womanhood—or rather having completed it, for there seemed nothing wanting to make the perfect woman.

A figure of medium height, neither sylphlike nor slender, but of full physical outline, in points even imposing.

I do not deny that there is something sensual in this

type, and I know there are those who incline more to the intellectual. For my part, I doubt the honesty of such ethereal admirers; and must still cling to the belief that bold elliptical outline is the true ideal of beauty in the feminine form.

That of Lola, seen against the verdant background of the chapparal, exhibited this curve in all its luxuriant windings. It was displayed in the tournure of the head, the cheeks, the throat, and shoulders; it embraced bosom, waist, and limbs; it ran over her whole figure—a living, moving curve, like the undulations of some beautiful serpent, always tapering to an end, but never terminating.

It was the curve discovered by Hogarth, though but poorly expressed in his pictures. It was perfectly presented in the outlines of the lovely apparition that came before my eyes in that moonlit glade, on the field of Cerro Gordo.

Her dress did not destroy the voluptuous line. It could not, even had it been one of those monstrous contrivances of fashion for concealing the too-often distorted form. But it was not thus designed. The sleeveless chemise of snow-white cambric, and the translucent skirt of thin muslin, like the gown of Nora Creina, left—

“ Every beauty free
To sink or swell as heaven pleases.”

The slight scarf of bluish grey cotton (*rebozo*) drawn over the crown of the head, and falling loosely down in front, scarcely interfered with the symmetrical outlines of the bosom; while behind, two thick plaits of hair, escaping from under it, hung down to the level of its fringed ends, terminating in a tie of bright red ribbons.

At first sight, I thought the girl was barefoot. The

skirt and petticoat (*enagua*) permitted to be seen beneath them a pair of statuesque ankles, nude to mid-knee. But although thus stockingless, I soon perceived that her feet were in *satin slippers*, hidden behind the herbage. Neither the naked ankles, nor the slight but costly *chaussure*, gave me any surprise, however inappropriate either might be deemed to a walk through the thorny chapparal. I knew that both were in the fashion of the country.

At the moment, I was not thinking of either circumstance, nor of the incongruity of bare feet in satin slippers. My eyes and thoughts were turned higher, gazing on a face of peculiar loveliness.

It was a beauty I remember well, but can ill describe.

To say that the complexion was a golden brown, with crimson in the cheeks; that the lips were like a pair of rose-leaves convexly curving against each other, and when parted, displaying a row of pearly teeth; that both eyebrows and lashes were crescent-shaped and black as ebony; that the eyes were of the same hue, but sparkling with liquid light; that the nose was slightly aquiline; the throat full and boldly rounded upward—to say all this, would only be to state a series of physical facts, which can give no idea of the loveliness of that face. It was the combination of these features—their mutual adaptation, their play, that produced the charm which I have called *peculiar*.

And it was so. Even with a heart at that time not wholly free, it enchained me—and I stood admiring. The face was near, and the moon full enough upon it to enable me to view it with distinctness. I could trace every feature, every shade of expression, even to the quick changing of the colour upon her cheek.

I stood in silence gazing on this apparition so unex-

pected, so lovely. Surprise, along with admiration, restrained my speech.

For a time the girl was equally silent, though her silence had a different cause. Her eyes were fixed, not upon me but upon the form at my feet. She had only glanced at me, and then quickly transferred her gaze to the prostrate figure.

It was a look of eager inquiry, lasting not long. In a second it changed to one of recognition, and the instant afterwards her eyes filled with an expression of intense agony. She saw Calros—her beloved Calros—prostrate, his face besprinkled with blood. It was Calros, silent, but not asleep ; speechless and motionless ; perhaps dead ?

“Dead ! Mother of God, dead !” were the words that, in accents of anguish, came peeling from the lips of Lola.

Her eyes flashed upward. In an instant the expression changed—grief giving place to indignation—something still more dire.

I saw that I was myself its object. With astonishment did I perceive this. It had not occurred to me to reflect on my compromising position. I was still standing over the body of the Jarocho, blood-besprinkled as it was. Less than five minutes before, Calros’s voice had been heard, along with that of another man, mingling in excited dialogue.

A shot had been fired. I held a pistol in my hand, from the muzzle of which a slight film of sulphureous smoke could be seen stringing outward. Calros appeared to be dead. Who but I could have been his slayer ?

I heard the word *asesino* ringing in my ears, with other epithets of like fearful signification, as the girl rushed up to the spot where I stood. There was no weapon in her

hand, or I might have fancied she was about to strike me. Even with her clenched fist, I was for a while uncertain whether this was not her intention; and to avoid her, I stepped back.

She stood for some seconds looking me straight in the face. Behind the parting of her tightly compressed lips was displayed a double row of teeth, that, despite their pearly whiteness, gleamed fiercely in the moonlight; while her eyes, as they flashed, seemed to send forth jets of living fire!

"I am innocent!" I called out. "It is not my act; it was not I who——"

"*Asesino ! monstre !* Whoever thou art; false fiend, to deny a deed of which—*madre de Dios !*—I have been almost a witness. There—there—the weapon still in your hands—his blood freshly spilt!"

"It is not *his* blood," I replied, hastily interrupting her.

But she heard not the rejoinder! for suddenly turning from me, she flung herself upon the prostrate form, drowning my voice with her wild exclamations.

"Dead! Calros! dear Calros! Are you dead? Speak to me one word—a whisper, to say you still live! *Ay de mi!* it is too true. No answer—no breath! Where is the wound that has robbed you of life, and me of my only friend? Where?—where?"

And as she continued to give voice to these detached exclamations, she proceeded, as if mechanically, to examine the wounds of the unconscious Jarocho.

CHAPTER VI.

▲ DEVOTED WOMAN.

I FELT the awkwardness of the situation. Appearances were against me. Some explanation must be given.

Stepping nearer, I bent down by the side of the young girl ; and as soon as her silence gave me an opportunity of being heard, repeated my asseveration.

"It is not *his* blood," I said, "but that of another. Your friend has received no wound—at least none lately given, and least of all by *me*. His death—if he be dead—has been caused by this."

I pointed to the dark spot on his thigh.

"It is a bullet wound received in the battle."

"The blood upon his bosom—his cheeks—you see—'tis fresh ?"

"I repeat it is not *his*. I speak truly."

My earnest utterance seemed to make an impression upon her.

"Whose then ? whose blood ?" she cried out.

"That of a man who was in the act of killing Calros, when my pistol frustrated his intent. I fear after all he may have been successful, though not exactly according to his design. He intended to have stabbed the wounded man with his *macheté*."

I took the mongrel sword, and held it up to the light.

"There's blood on its blade, as you see ; but it is that of him who would have been the true assassin, had not my bullet disabled his arm. Have you ever seen this weapon before ?"

"O ñor ; I could not tell. 'Tis a *macheté*. They're all alike."

"Have you ever heard the name of Ramon Rayas?"

The answer was an exclamation—almost a shriek!

"You know him, then?"

"Ramon Rayas! oh, the fiend—he—it was he. He vowed to kill Calros. Calros! O Calros! Has he fulfilled his vow?"

Once more the girl bent over the body of the Jarocho; and leaning low, recklessly placed her lips in contact with his blood-stained cheek. At the same time her arms fondly flung around, seemed to enfold the corpse in a loving embrace. Had he been alive and conscious, with the certainty of recovering, I could have envied him that sweet entwining.

My impulse was of a holier nature. If I could not restore the dead, I might give comfort to the living. But was he dead? It was not till that moment I had doubted it.

As I stooped over the body, I heard a sound that resembled a sigh. It could not be the sobbing of the bereaved Lola—though this also was audible.

The girl had again raised her head, and was holding it a little to one side, while the sound that had attracted my attention seemed to proceed from a different direction—in fact from the lips of the man supposed to be dead.

I lowered my ear to his face, and listened for a repetition of the sound. It came in a moment as I had before heard it—a sort of sigh half suppressed, like the breath struggling from a bosom over-weighted.

"Lola," I whispered, "your Calros is not dead. He still breathes."

I needed not to communicate this intelligence. The ear of affection had been bent, keenly as my own. By the sudden brightening of her countenance, I could perceive

that Lola had heard that same sound, and was listening to catch it again, as if her life depended on its repetition.

She had mechanically pushed me aside, so that her ear might be closer to the mute lips of Calros.

"One moment," I said, gently raising her from her recumbent position ; "perhaps he has only fainted. I have a remedy here ; a stimulant that may serve to restore him. Permit me to administer it."

I drew forth the flask which providentially I had brought from the tent. It contained "Catalan brandy," one of the most potent of spirits.

Silently but readily she glided out of the way, watching my movements like some affectionate sister who assists the physician by the couch of an invalid brother.

I felt the pulse of the wounded man. My medical skill was not extensive ; but I could perceive that its beating, though feeble, was not irregular—not flickering, like a lamp that was destined soon to become extinguished.

Lola read hope in my looks : her own became brighter.

I pulled out the stopper. I applied the flask to the lips of the unconscious Calros, pouring into his mouth a portion of the Catalonian spirit.

The effect was almost instantaneous. His bosom began to heave, his breath issued forth more freely, his glazed eyes showed signs of reanimation.

The girl could scarcely be restrained from repeating her fond embraces.

Presently the eyes of the invalid seemed to see—almost to recognize. His lips moved, as though he was endeavouring to speak, but as yet there came forth no sound.

Once more I applied the flask, pouring into his throat nearly a wine-glassful of the Catalan.

In less than a score of seconds the dose produced its effect—made known by a movement throughout the frame of the Jarocho, and a muttered whisper proceeding from his lips.

Again the girl would have strangled him with her passionate caresses. Judging from the joy with which she witnessed his resuscitation, her affection for him must have been boundless.

“Keep away from him!” I said, adding to the verbal caution a slight exertion of physical force. “There is scarcely an ounce of blood in his body, that is why he has fainted; that and the shock caused by the threat of——” I did not choose to disquiet her by repeating what appeared to be a dreaded name. “Excitement of any kind may prove fatal. *If you love him* stay out of his sight; at least for a while, till he recover strength sufficient to bear your presence.”

How idle in me to have made use of these words, “if you love him!” The appearance of the handsome Jarocho, handsome even with death’s pallor on his brow, forbade any other belief; while the beautiful Jarocho, beautiful through all the changes of anger and hate, despair and hope, showed by her every action that Calros Vergara was the loved one of her life.

“Keep out of sight,” I again requested: “pray do not go near him till I return. The night air is unfavourable to his recovery. I must seek assistance, and have him carried into my tent. I entreat you, *Senorita*, do not make yourself known to him now, or the shock may be fatal.”

The look given by the girl, in answer to my solicitations, produced upon me an impression at once vivid and peculiar. It was a mingling of pleasure and pain, just in proportion

as my fancy whispered me, that in those glances there was something more than gratitude.

Alas ! it is true. Even in that melancholy hour, I felt pleasure in the thought that, whether he might recover or die, I should one day supplant Calros Vergara in the affections of his beloved Lola !

CHAPTER VII.

DESPOILING THE DEAD.

I AROUSED half-a-dozen of my men from their midnight slumbers. Among them was one who had some skill in surgery, derived from a long experience as hospital assistant.

There was a *catre*, or leathern bedstead, in the tent—a common article of camp furniture among the officers of the Mexican army. By splicing a pair of tent-poles along its sides, it could be converted into a “stretcher” of a superior kind.

The transformation was soon made ; and, returning to the chapparal, we placed the wounded man upon the *catre*, with as much tenderness as if, instead of an enemy, he had been one of our own comrades.

He had by this time so far recovered as to be sensible of what was passing ; but it was not until he had been carried within the tent, and his wound carefully dressed by the ex-hospital assistant, that I consented to an interview between him and his “querida Lola.”

Mistrusting the effect of any sudden excitement—even though caused by joy—I had entreated the girl to remain out of sight ; and though suffering from a painful im-

patience to speak to her beloved Calros, she had obeyed me.

Being assured by the improvised surgeon that there was no real danger; that the wound was not likely to prove fatal; and that the syncope of the wounded man had been caused by weakness from loss of blood, I withdrew the restriction.

In an instant after, the beautiful Lola flew into the arms of her lover.

It was an affecting scene, and touched even my rude companions, who stood around the *catre*. To me it was not pleasant—I might almost say it was painful—to listen to that interchange of endearing epithets. I coveted the caresses that were being lavished upon the handsome Jarocho.

Soon the soldiers withdrew, to resume their interrupted repose, the hospital assistant going with the rest. I was left in the tent with Calros and Lola.

I could not help envying the invalid. For the sake of being tended by such a nurse, I would willingly have changed situations with him!

Lola had heard the assurance given by the hospital assistant, and communicated it to the wounded man. There was no longer the dread of death to hinder them from indulging in a free interchange of thought.

Perhaps they had something to say to each other which should not be overheard by any one? Under the idea that my presence might be a restraint, I withdrew; I shall not say without reluctance.

Throwing my cloak over my shoulders, I walked out of the tent, leaving them alone.

The night was still; the silence more solemn than ever. Not a sound disturbed it. Even the moanings of the dis-

abled men, who lay here and there over the field of battle, which at an earlier hour had been well-nigh continuous, seemed now to have ceased.

I was astonished by this circumstance, and mentally endeavoured to account for it. Perhaps the report of my pistol had awed them into silence, under the belief that the "strippers" were abroad, and that it was better to endure their agonies in silence than to guide those vultures in their villanous search! This was the only explanation I could think of.

I strolled off into the chapparal; but I soon found my way back into the neighbourhood of the tent. Under that piece of spread canvas, rendered luminous by the lamp burning inside, there was an attraction that drew me nearer and nearer. It was irresistible; and involuntarily yielding to it, I at length found myself in front of the arcade-like entrance, gazing inward.

The flap was thrown back; and I could see the occupants inside, the invalid stretched upon the *catre*, lying on his back as we had left him, the girl bending over him, her eyes fixed steadily upon his face. I could see that he was asleep; but not the less affectionately were those beautiful eyes bent upon his slumbering features.

The tableau should have gratified;—it tortured me!

I turned away to escape from an emotion—evil, as it was unpleasant.

I walked over the ground, lately the arena of the enemy's camp, among other tents that stood near. There were not many of them. Arbours formed by the interlacing of branches, and thatched with reeds and grass, had constituted the chief shelter of Santa Anna's soldiers.

His superior officers only had been provided with tents, of which not more than a dozen were now standing.

Several of them I entered. They were not all empty, though their living occupants had deserted them. Three or four I found tenanted by the dead. Stretched upon *catres*, or lying upon the floor, were the bodies of men whose uniforms showed them to have been officers of high rank.

One lay so near to the entrance of a tent, that the moonbeams, slanting inward through the opening of the canvas, fell full upon his face. He was a man of magnificent form, with a countenance that even in death might be termed handsome. His complexion was a dark olive, his features perfectly regular, with a coal-black moustache and chin-beard. His dress was half civilian, half military, with insignia embroidered upon the shoulder-straps, proclaiming him a general of division. His name I learnt afterwards, Vasquez, one of the bravest of our foes, who had gallantly held his position on the hill of El Telegrafo till the last moment for retreating. A bullet through the groin terminated what might otherwise have been a brilliant career ; and he had been carried to his tent only to die.

No attempt had been made to dress his wound. It was perhaps looked upon as hopeless ; and in the panic of retreat even an officer of rank is oft neglected. Over the groin his trousers had been torn open, as if done to examine the wound, and the sky-blue cloth, of which the garment was composed, was saturated with blood, now dark and dry. Its salt odour pervaded the atmosphere, and I was about returning outward ; for, attracted by the distinguished appearance of the dead body, I had stepped inside the tent to examine it ; when a singular, I might say a startling, observation, caused me to remain where I was.

The corpse lay upon its back, the head about midway upon the floor of the tent, with the feet protruding beyond

the canvas on the outside, a little to one side of the entrance. It was the feet, in fact, first seen, that had drawn my attention; and the peculiar *chaussure* which they displayed caused me to stoop down and examine them. They were encased in elegant russet boots—such as were worn in the time of the second Charles, and now only seen upon the stage. A pair of bright spurs buckled over them, sparkled in the moonlight.

Had I not looked inside at the body, to which this singular *chaussure* belonged, I might have fancied a cavalier of the olden time asleep within the tent; but the very oddness of the foot-gear influenced me to examine the individual to whom it appertained.

Stepping up to the entrance, my eyes had fallen upon the handsome face; but as my own shadow hindered me from thoroughly examining it, I had gone inside to obtain a better view.

It was after I had completed the observations above detailed that I became witness of the spectacle that startled me.

As I have said, I was on the point of returning out of the tent. To do so it would be necessary for me to pass close to the corpse, in fact, to step over it, as I had done on going inside. As I raised my foot to effect this purpose, I fancied that the body moved!

In surprise I drew back my foot, and stood watching, not without a feeling of fear.

The feeling was not diminished, but increased almost to the degree of horror, when I became convinced that what I saw was no fancy—no optical illusion. *The body had actually moved, and was still in motion!*

Had I not observed the motion, the change of posture would have convinced me it was taking place: for the

head, originally lying in the middle of the tent, was now nearer its edge, and gradually, but surely, approaching the circle of canvas !

All doubt would have been removed—had any existed—when I saw the corpse give, or rather receive, a sudden jerk, which brought the head close in to the canvas.

I could stay no longer inside that tent ; and with a single bound I carried myself clear of the entrance.

No sooner did I get outside, than I was relieved from the influence of the supernatural. A perfectly natural—perhaps I should say unnatural—cause divested the phenomenon of its mystery. A man was in the act of stripping General Vasquez of his boots !

With shame I recognized the uniform of an American rifleman.

In justice to that uniform be it told, that the man was not an American, but a worthless mongrel, half Jew, half German ; who on more than one occasion had received chastisement for strange crimes, and who afterwards, in a future battle—as I have good reason to know—fired his traitorous bullet at my own back.

“Laundrich ! ruffian !” I cried. “Despoiling the dead !”

“Ach ! tish only a Mexican—our enemish, captan.”

“Scoundrel ! desist from your unhallowed work, or I shall devote you to a worse fate than his whose noble remains you are defiling. Off to your quarters ! Off, I say !”

The human wolf skulked away, unwillingly, and with an air of savage chagrin.

I never came nearer slaying a fellow-creature—not to accomplish the act.

Better, perhaps, had I completed it on that occasion. It would have spared me a severe shot-wound, after-



A MAN WAS IN THE ACT OF STRIPPING GENERAL VASQUEZ OF HIS
BOOTS !

wards received, with certain other disagreeable *contre-temps*, of which Johanna Laundrich was prime agent and promoter.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PLEASANT EXPLANATION.

THE peculiar spectacle thus witnessed for a while distracted my thoughts from the marquee and its occupants.

Only for a short while. Soon again the lovely face of Lola rose up before the eye of my imagination; and the longing to look upon it became stronger than ever.

Yielding to this fascination—for which I could scarcely account—I strolled back to the *ci-devant* head-quarters of the Mexican commander-in-chief.

On arriving in front of the entrance I paused.

Had the invalid been still asleep, I might have hesitated about disturbing him. But his voice warned me that he was awake, and in conversation with some one—who, of course, could be no other than Lola.

Even then I hesitated about going in; but while thus meditating, I could not help overhearing a portion of the dialogue that was passing between them. A name already known was on the lips of Calros, from which I could easily divine the subject of their conversation. It was the name of Ramon Rayas.

“Yes, dearest Lola,” said the invalid, as if replying to some interrogatory, “it was that villain. Not content with persecuting you with his infamous proposals, he has followed me, even to the field of battle? He would have killed me outright. *Carrambo!* I thought he had done so. I saw him standing over me with his *macheté* pointed

at my breast. I was too weak to make resistance. I could not raise a hand to parry his thrust. He did not strike. I know not why. There was a shot ; and then I saw him standing over me again, with a pistol, its muzzle held close to my body. *Valga me Dios !* I saw no more. I became unconscious."

"Dear Calros ! it was not Rayas who held the pistol."

"Not him !—not Ramon Rayas. It *was*, Lola. I saw him. I heard and talked to him. I listened to his threats. He wanted me to tell him—— Oh ! too surely was it he—he, and no other."

"Yes, he who threatened you with the *macheté*. That's true enough ; but the man who held the pistol—that was not Don Ramon ; not an enemy either, though I also thought him one."

"And who was it ?" asked the invalid, with a puzzled look upon his countenance.

"The *Americano*—he who has had you carried here into the tent."

"Which of them ? There were several around me. Was it the *medico* who dressed my wound ? He must be a doctor to have done it so skilfully."

"No, it was not he."

"Which, then, Lola ?"

"You saw an officer among them, did you not ?—a handsome young officer ?"

My heart then thrilled with a pleasant emotion. I bent my eyes with keen scrutiny upon the face of the invalid. I expected to see there an expression denoting jealousy. I thought it strange that no such thought could be detected on the features of Calros Vergara.

"He must be brave, too," continued the girl, "to have conquered the Capitan Rayas."

“Conquered Rayas! How? What mean you, Lola?”

“You see those spots of blood on your shirt-bosom? There were others on your face, but I have washed them off. I thought it was yours, Calros.”

“And is it not?”

“No. This is fresh blood, as you may tell by looking at it. It is not yet quite dried. Thanks to the holy Virgin, it is not yours; to lose more would have killed you, Calros; the *medico* said so.”

“*Carrambo!* whose is it then?”

“Don Ramon’s.”

“How? Tell me, Lola!”

“You say he was threatening to run you through with his *macheté*. You heard a shot? It was not Ramon, but the young officer, who fired it; and the bullet was aimed at Rayas himself, and not at you. It must have hit him, for his *macheté* was found beside you, the hilt stained with blood; and these drops must have come from the wound he received. Ah! *dear brother Calros!* but for this brave Americano you would now have been in another world, and I left in this, alone, and without a protector.”

Brother Calros!

A load seemed lifted from my heart; the arrow, so lately entering it, and already beginning to rankle, appeared to be suddenly plucked from it without causing pain.

Brother Calros!

No longer did I wonder at the stoical indifference with which the Jarocho had listened to that flattering eulogy bestowed upon myself.

“No, Lola Vergara”—for that should be her name—
“No! Never in this world, so long as *I* live, shall you, beautiful Jarocho, be without a protector!”

That was my thought, my mental resolution. I could scarcely restrain myself from rushing into the tent, and proclaiming it aloud!

CHAPTER IX.

EVIL IMAGININGS.

MY discovery of the real relationship existing between Calros and Lola at once cured me of an incipient jealousy, which, though slight, had promised to become sufficiently painful.

Its very existence, however, would have proved to me that I was already in love, had such proof been required to convince me.

But I needed not to reason on that head. I knew that I was enamoured with Lola Vergara—had fallen in love with her at first sight—at that very moment when her accusing eyes flashed fiercely upon me, and through her dazzling teeth was hissed forth that angry epithet, proclaiming me a *murderer*! In the full tide of anger, with frowning face and furious look, had she appeared lovely—scarcely less lovely than now in her smiles!

I had since beheld these. She smiled on learning that Calros was in no danger of death. She smiled on me as the preserver of his life, gratefully—I fancied *graciously*. On that fancy I had founded a hope; and hence the jealousy that had so quickly and causelessly arisen.

The hope became strengthened on hearing that fraternal apostrophe, "*Hermanita Calros!*" pronounced in a language unequalled in the phraseology of affectionate endearment.

The words bespoke a relationship far different from that I had supposed to exist between them—leaving her bosom

free for another affection—a passion compatible, if not kindred.

Was it my destiny to inspire this passion? Was that grand triumph to be mine?

Her singular speeches, not very honestly overheard, filled me with hope.

I hesitated about entering the tent. I no longer desired to interrupt a dialogue that had caused me such supreme pleasure; and yet I yearned to proffer my devotion—to stand once more face to face, and eye to eye, with the beautiful Jarocha.

In any case I could not continue to play the part of an eavesdropper. I could now perceive the indelicacy of the act—especially as my satisfied heart no longer needed soothing.

I must either enter, or withdraw. I decided upon entering.

But not till I had set my forage-cap more coquettishly upon my head, drawn my fingers through my hair, and given to my moustache its most captivating curl.

I confess to all this weakness. I was at that time full of conceit in my personal appearance. I had heard the phrase, “handsome young officer,” applied to me by one from whose lips dropped the words like the honey of Hymettus; and, inspired by the flattering epithet, I left nothing undone to deserve it.

Nevertheless I felt embarrassed, as I presented myself once more before the lovely Lola—an embarrassment heightened by the presence of her brother.

Wonder at this, if you will. It is too easily explained. I entered the tent with the consciousness of a design that was not honourable. I stood before them both—the sister and brother—with a conscience not clear. At that moment

—I confess it to my shame—I had no other thought than that of trifling with the affections of the beautiful Jarocha.

She was but a peasant—one of a race, it is true, to whom the appellation is somewhat inappropriate—a people, though poor, elegant in person, graceful in deportment, highly gifted with the *savoir faire*, as it relates to the ordinary intercourse of life—at the same time a people in whose pantheon the divinity, Virtue, finds but an inconspicuous niche.

Neither the first nor the last of these reflections may be deemed an excuse for my conduct. I do not offer them as such, though both serving at the time to satisfy my conscience.

Its scruples were not difficult to subdue. Its still small voice was unheard, or rather unheeded, under the promptings of a powerful, but unholy passion, of which Lola Vergara was then the object, and as I hoped, afterwards to become the victim.

She was but a peasant, a pretty *poblana*—perhaps already inducted into the mysteries of Cupid's court: for it would be rare for one of her race to have reached woman's age without loving. The sister of a common soldier—for such was the rank of Calros—what harm could be done? What wrong could I be dreaming about?

I did not need all this sophistry to satisfy the whisperings of my conscience. At that time of my life the task was easy of accomplishment—too easy; and with such a lure as Lola Vergara it was less than a task.

I made no effort to resist the temptation. On the contrary, I devoted myself to the winning of her heart with all the ardour of an important enterprise.

It was her *heart* I wished to win, and that only. *I*

wished it because she had won mine. I deny that I had any design beyond—any thought more dishonourable. That of itself may be deemed sufficiently so, since I had no intention of offering her my hand.

Her love alone did I care for ; though I will not conceal my belief, that, in the event of conquering her *heart*, any other conquest would be facile and without resistance.

This was my faith at the time—a faith founded on sad experience. I applied it to Lola Vergara, as I should have done to any other girl under the like circumstances.

The future would prove whether my creed was erroneous as it was dishonourable.

I entered the tent. She, whose affections I intended trifling with, rose from her seat, saluting me, as I stepped forward, with an air of modesty that might have shamed my secret thoughts. Her glance was full of gratitude. How ill did I deserve it !

“Señor,” said she, after answering my inquiries as to the condition of the invalid, “I hope you will forgive me for the rude manner in which I addressed you. *Volga me Dios !* To have made such a mistake ! I thought you had killed my brother, not knowing when I saw you standing over him. O señor ! you will forgive me ?”

“There is nothing to forgive, fair Lola. Considering the situation, you could scarcely have thought otherwise. Fortunately, no one has succeeded in killing your brother ; not even the American rifleman who sent his bullet through him. I am glad to hear that the wound is not dangerous.”

“Ah, señor,” interposed Calros himself, “but for you—Lola has just been telling me—but for you I should have had a wound, not only dangerous, but deadly. That *cor-tante* (the Jarocho pointed to the blood-stained weapon

lying on the floor of the tent) would have pierced my flesh—my heart. I know it; I am sure of it. He meant to have killed me! *El demonio!*”

“You are speaking of Ramon Rayas?”

“Of him!—pardon, señor Americano. You cannot know anything of him? How learnt you his name?”

“From your own lips, Calros Vergara; and your name from his. From both of you a name prettier than either.”

I glanced towards Lola, who returned my look with a gracious smile.

Calros looked puzzled; as if not very clearly comprehending me.

“You forget,” I said, “that in the conversation which occurred between you and this Ramon Rayas, you repeatedly addressed each other by name; and also mentioned a third individual, whose acquaintance I have since had the pleasure of making—your sister, is she not?”

“Si, ñor capitan. Ña Lola is my sister.”

“She is worthy to be your sister, senor Calros. She who follows a brother to the field of battle—seeks for him among the slain—risking life to alleviate the pain of his wounds—ah! that is a sister for a soldier. Would that I had such an one!”

While speaking I regarded the countenance of the girl. I regarded it with a tender gaze. I fancied that she returned my thought, but so slightly as to have been perceptible only to the keen scrutiny of love. It was only a single glance she gave me; and then the long lashes fell over her eyes, hiding their sweet scintillation.

When I had finished speaking, she turned towards me, but without raising her eyes. Then pronouncing the formal phrase, “*Mil gracios señor,*” she stepped silently towards the entrance of the tent.

Before passing out, she paused a moment to state apologetically the object of her departure—some trifling errand relating to the invalid.

But for this I might have fancied that my flattery had offended, or perhaps the glance of gallantry with which I had regarded her. Even had it been so, I could not then have apologized : for in another instant she was gone.

CHAPTER X.

AN IMPLACABLE PURSUER.

I WAS in the midst of circumstances still unexplained. A wounded man found lying upon the field of battle—a mere youth ; in no respect, either in costume, accoutrements, or personal appearance, resembling the thing called a “common soldier,” and yet bearing no insignia to show that he was aught else.

Found with an enemy standing over him, not a national foe, but a countryman—and, as it appeared, an old school-fellow, *macheté* in hand, threatening to accomplish what the foeman had left incomplete—threatening his life, and only hindered from taking it by the merest accidental intervention !

Near at hand, soon after to appear by his side, a woman—not one of those hideous hags sometimes seen on the morrow of a bloody battle, skulking among the slain, and stooping, vulture-like, over the mangled corpse—but a young girl of sweet voice and lovely aspect ; so contrasting with the rude objects around her, so apparently out of place amid such scenes, that instead of a human being, a form of flesh and blood, one might have believed her to

be an angel of mercy, that had descended from the sky to soothe the sufferings which men in their frantic fury had caused one another !

And this angel-like creature to prove the *sister*—and not the *sweetheart*—of him whose cries had called me from my couch !

Even in this circumstance there was something to cause me surprise. It would not have been the first time I had met the soldier's sweetheart on the field of battle ; but never before had I encountered his sister.

I might have been more surprised at this peculiar encounter, but that on the afternoon of that very day I had been spectator of a scene calculated to explain it. In a field adjoining the hamlet-village of El Plan I had gazed upon four thousand soldiers of Santa Anna's army made prisoners during the action ; and circling among them—not as spectators, but real actors in the affairs of the camp—were at least half this number of women !

Though most stood in a different relationship, I learned that many of these devoted creatures were the sisters—some of them the mothers—of the men who had mingled in the fight !

I could not help contrasting this bi-sexual crowd with the invading army to which I myself appertained ; in which some half-dozen hags, under the appellation of sutler's assistants ; a like number performing the *metier* of the laundress ; and one or two virgins of still more questionable calling, formed the whole female camp-following.

After such a scene as that witnessed by the *rancheria* of El Plan, it could not much astonish me to find the sister of Carlos Vergara on the field of battle. My astonishment only arose from seeing *such a sister* !

On being left alone with the Jarocho, I could no longer

repress my desire to obtain an explanation of the series of mysteries, that had so suddenly and unexpectedly surrounded me.

My interference in his behalf had furnished me with a sort of right to make the request—even to demand it.

“Ramon Rayas,” I said, as soon as the girl was gone out of hearing—“This Ramon Rayas appears to be no friend of yours?”

“Ah, señor! my bitterest enemy.”

“He is not the enemy of your sister, though? He professes to be her very best friend—at least her lover, which should be the same thing? Is *she* of that opinion?”

“My sister hates him.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“Ñor capitan, you are a stranger to me; but the service you’ve this night performed makes me feel as if I were talking to an old friend. Excuse the freedom I take. I am only a poor Jarocho—owning nothing but my *ranch*o, a few varas of garden-ground, my horse, my saddle, and my *machet*é. I was going to say my liberty, but that’s not true: else why am I dragged from my home to fight battles in which I have no interest? You may say what our military oppressors say—it is to fight for my country. Bah! what use in spilling one’s blood for a country that’s not free? It isn’t for that I’ve been brought to Cerro Gordo, and shot down like a dog. It was to fight for a tyrant, not for a country—for El Cojo, and nobody else!”

“You have not been in the battle by your own will, then?”

Carrambo! nothing of the sort, *ñor deconocio!* I am here by conscription; and I’ve been shot down by conscription. No matter now. We have no liberty left in

Mexico—at least I have none. Still, *ñor capitán*, there's one treasure left to me which I prize above everything else before riches, or even liberty. It was left me by my parents—who have long ago gone to a better world."

"What treasure?" I inquired, seeing that the speaker hesitated to declare it.

"*Ña Lola—mia hermanita.*" (Lola, my dear sister.)

"I hope there is no danger of your losing her?"

"There is. This very night you must have heard something to tell you that there is."

"'Tis true I heard something that sounded like a threat; but what need you fear from a man who can have no control over you or your sister? You say she scorns his suit. If that be so, I cannot understand how she is in danger."

"Ah! *ñor doconocio!* you know not our country, else you might understand. The man you speak of has power; that is, if he be still alive."

The speaker glanced significantly towards the blood-stained cutlass.

"Power! How?"

"He is my captain. I am one of a band of *guerrilleros*, raised in our village and neighbourhood. This man, Don Ramon Rayas, is our chief. He had his appointment from the dictator himself, Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. It's a puzzle to me—and to others as well—how he obtained it: for it's well known that before the beginning of this war with the Americanos, Rayas was a *salteador*."

"A highway robber!"

"Neither more nor less, *ñor capitán*."

"I heard you apply that unenviable appellation to him. But what can be his motive for attempting to take your life?"

"Only to get rid of me; and then Lola—my poor

sister would be more easily—*carrai!* you know what I mean!"

I needed not a more ample explanation, though Calros proceeded to give it.

"Ñor deconocio," said he, speaking in a low voice, so as not to be heard outside the tent, "I shall tell you all about it. You've seen my sister. Well, perhaps to you, whose countrywomen I have heard say are very fair-skinned, Lola may not appear much——"

I did not interrupt Calros to tell him *how much*.

"Here, among us Jarocho, though I, her brother, say it, Lolita is thought *muy linda*."

"She would be thought so anywhere, I should say."

"Well," proceeded the conscript, apparently pleased at my remark, "good looks in a girl are sometimes only a misfortune to her—more especially if she be poor, and that is just what Lola is."

"A misfortune! How?"

I put the question with a keener interest than the invalid suspected.

Had Lola been already the victim of a misfortune?

"You see, sir stranger," rejoined Calros, "among those who have set their eyes upon ña Lola is this Ramon Rayas."

"An old school-fellow of yours, is he not?"

"True—such schooling as we had. That is long ago. Since then we have never seen him till lately. He left our village, and went to live in the great city of Puebla—a wicked place, though it be called the *City of the angels*. We didn't hear of him for a long time; and then we were told that he had taken to the *camino real*—had become, as I've said, a *salteador*."

"And now he is an officer in the Mexican army?"

"That's the strangest of all. But no. It's not so strange to us down here, who are well acquainted with Don Antonio. Ramon Rayas isn't the only *picaro* in his employ. As I've told you, we'd seen nothing of Ramon since he was a boy at school. Then one day he reappeared among us with a commission to recruit—no, not that, but rather to take us young fellows by force, and make soldiers of us. I was compelled to go with the rest. We were formed into a *guerilla*, with Rayas as our captain. It was at that time his eyes fell upon Lola."

"But did your sister accompany you in the campaign?"

"She did. There were many other women with us—the wives and sisters of my comrades. They came to work for us, and make us comfortable in camp. It is our custom, ñor Americano. 'Tis not so with you, I am told."

"No, we don't trouble ourselves with such company."

"Ah, ñor capitan, it has indeed proved a trouble to me. It has required all to protect my poor little sister."

"Protect her! Against whom?"

"Our captain—Don Ramon. His importunities—cruelties I should call them—were of daily, hourly occurrence. They were growing worse, when——"

"You sent her out of his reach?"

"I did. I found a friend who offered me a home for her. My friend promised to keep her concealed, until this war should be over, and I could return home to protect her as a freeborn citizen of the republic."

"How came she to be here to-night?"

"Devotion," proudly replied the youth; "devotion, ñor capitan. She heard from some fugitives that I was shot down and left on the field. She came to find me—if dead to weep over my body—if living, to take care of me. Thanks to you, ñor deconocio, she has found me alive."

After a short interval of silence, in which the invalid appeared to reflect, he resumed speech.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he said, "if Rayas had succeeded in killing me! But for you, ñor, he must have succeeded. Lola was near at hand, calling my name. He would have heard her. She would have come up, and then the wolf and the lamb would have met in the middle of the chaparral. *Madre de Dios! Thanks that she is saved!*"

As the more than probable consequence of such a meeting became pictured in the imagination of the Jarocho, he raised himself, half erect, upon the camp bedstead, and emphatically repeated the thanksgiving.

The words had scarcely passed from his lips, when, for the third time, the mother of God was invoked.

On this occasion, however, a different cause had called forth the invocation—a cry heard outside the tent in the silvery intonation of a woman's voice.

It was easy to recognize the utterance of Dolores. On hearing it the invalid sprang clear out of the *catre*; and stood for some moments balancing himself upon the floor.

Yielding to his weakness, he fell back upon the couch, just as the girl rushed inside the tent—proclaiming by her presence that no harm had befallen her.

"What is it, *dear* Lola?" cried her brother, almost word for word repeating my own interrogatory.

"He! Don Ramon! He is there—outside the tent!"

"If he will only stay till I come out, I promise you, fair Lola, you shall never more be troubled by his presence."

I drew my sword from its sheath, and was rushing for the opening in the canvas.

"Ñor, ñor! *por amor Dios!* Go not alone! Don Ramon is wicked; but he is *brave*—he is dangerous!"

It was *Dolores* who interrupted me with these strange speeches.

"Brave!" I said, turning to her with angry astonishment. "Brave! a villain such as he, brave!"

I spoke with a bitter emphasis. The thought had shot across my brain, that the scorn of which Calros spoke, might have been only a fraternal fancy!

"I hope he will have courage enough to wait my coming. We shall see!"

And with this valorous declaration, I emerged from the marquee, and ran over the ground in search of Don Ramon.

Half a score of my comrades, who had started from their couches on hearing the scream, were soon around me; but although we quartered the chapparal for a good stretch on every side of the encampment, we could find no trace of the robber.

Having doubled the number of the sentries, and taken other precautions against the return of this terrible intruder, I re-entered the tent which gave shelter to the Jarocho and his sister.

Restoring the invalid to such repose as was possible, I made preparations to leave them for the night. The girl was to sleep upon the floor of the marquee, under cover of a *serapé*, which I had procured for her accommodation.

"Have no fear, *Linda Lola!*" I whispered, as reluctantly I bade good night. "He who would harm thee must first pass over my body. *I shall sleep outside—before the entrance of the tent. Adios! Pasa V. buena noche! Hasta la mañana!*"

"*Hasta la mañana!*" was the reply—simply my own words repeated, and with an innocent unconcern, that should have nipped in the bud any unhallowed hopes.

CHAPTER XI.

A MEXICAN MEDICO.

IN front of the tent—as I had whispered to her—I lay upon the ground, enfolded in my cloak. It was not the cold that kept me from sleeping, but the proximity—I might almost say the *presence* of that fair creature, since only a sheet of thin canvas was between us.

I will not confess my thoughts ; they are unworthy of being recorded. Even my dreams—for I had short intervals of sleep, during which I dreamt—all tended to one theme :—the enjoyment of the beautiful Jarochoa.

I listened long, with my ear keenly bent to catch the slightest sound. I felt no interest in the noises without. The night was now hastening towards day, and the sufferers who had been making it hideous seemed to have become wearied with wailing, for their voices were no longer heard.

Alone echoed upon the air the mocking strains of the *czentzontle*, perched upon the summit of an acacia, and answering a friend, perhaps an enemy, far off on the opposite side of the *barranca*.

The bird music fell unheeded on my ear, as did all other sounds proceeding from without. Even the firing of a gun would scarcely have distracted my attention from listening for any murmur that might reach me from the interior of the tent.

I could hear the heavy breathing of the invalid ; nothing more.

Once he coughed, and became restless upon his couch. Then I heard a sweet silvery voice speaking in accents of

affectionate inquiry, and ending in the pronounciation of some soothing words.

From other sounds I could tell that his nurse had arisen, and was ministering to the invalid.

By the silence, soon restored, I could perceive that she had completed her task, and had returned to her recumbent position.

She appeared to have no thoughts of him who was keeping guard without ;—not as her guardian angel, but rather demon, who would not have hesitated to destroy that innocence which enabled her to sleep !

Just in proportion as the time passed, so increased my respect for Lola Vergara, and my contempt for myself.

The lovelight I had observed in her eyes was but her natural look—the simple expression of her wondrous beauty. It had no signification—at least none that was evil—and in mistaking it for the glance of a guilty passion I had erred—deeply wronging her.

Soothed by this more honourable reflection, I at length fell asleep, just as the grey light of dawn was beginning to steal over the *spray* of the chapparal.

I could not have been very long unconscious, for the beams of the sun had scarcely attained their full brilliancy, when I was again awakened—this time, not by the conflict of passion within, but by the voices of men without. The challenge of a sentry had first struck upon my ear,—quickly followed by a parley with some one who had approached the tent.

In the scarcely intelligible dialogue that ensued, I could tell that the man challenged was a Mexican, who, in broken English, was endeavouring to satisfy the demands of the sentry.

The dialogue ran thus :—

"Who goes there?"

"*Amigos !* friends!" was the response.

"'Dvance, and gie the countersign!"

"*Señor centinela !* we are *medicos*—surgeon, you call—of the *ejercito*—armee Mejicano."

"Ye're Mexicans, are ye? Take care what ye're about then. What d'ye want hyar?"

"We are *medicos*—doctor—*entiende usted ?*"

"Docturs, ye say. Humph! if that's what ye be, ye mout be o' some use hyar, I reckon. There's a good wheen o' yer sodgers gone under for want o' docturin. F'r all that I can't let you pass 'ithout the countersign; leastwise till I've called the corporal o' the guard."

The group, who stood in front of the faithful sentinel awaiting permission to pass, was full under my eyes, as I turned my face towards it. The persons comprising it numbered about a score of men, only one of whom was in uniform. This individual wore a frock-coat of blue broad-cloth, very long in the skirt, with gilt buttons over the breast, crimson edging, and a cord trimming of gold lace. His pantaloons were of similar colour to the coat—in fact, of the same kind of cloth. Instead of a military cap or shako he wore a black glazé hat, with broad brim; while several minor articles of dress and equipment proclaimed a costume half military, half civilian—such a style as might be seen in any army during a campaign, but more especially in that of Mexico.

The other personages of the party were variously clad—some in half military costumes, but most of them in plain clothes,—if any garments worn in Mexico can be so qualified. Several of them, two-and-two, bore stretchers between them; while others carried surgical instruments, lint, and labelled phials—insignia that declared their calling. They were the

hospital staff, the *asistentes* of the young officer who preceded them, and who was evidently a surgeon belonging to the Mexican army.

It was he who had accosted the sentry.

The appearance of this party on the field of battle needed no explanation. No more did there need to be any ceremony as to their introduction.

On seeing them, I shouted to the sentry to let them pass without waiting for the arrival of that important functionary—the “corporal of the guard.”

As I arose to my feet, I was confronted by the Mexican *medico*, to whose indifferent English I had been for some time listening.

“Señor Capitan,” he said, after saluting me with a polite wave of the hand, “I have been told that I may address you in my own language. In it, and in the name of humanity, let me thank you for the kindness you have shown to our wounded soldiers. In you, sir, we no longer recognise an enemy.”

“The trifling assistance I have rendered is scarcely deserving of thanks. I fear that to some of the poor fellows who were its recipients it has been of no avail. More than one of them must have succumbed during the night.”

“That reminds me, Señor Capitan, that I should not lose time. I carry, as you perceive, a *safeguard* from the American Commander-in-chief.”

While speaking, he held out the document referred to, in order that I might examine it.

“It is not necessary,” I said; “you are of the medical staff; your errand is your passport.”

“Enough, Señor Capitan. I shall proceed to the accomplishment of my duty. In the name of humanity and Mexico, once more I thank you !”

Saying this, he walked off with his followers towards that portion of the field, where most of his wounded countrymen had miserably passed the night.

In the style and personal appearance of this Mexican there was a gracefulness peculiarly impressive. He was a man of not less than fifty years of age, of dark complexion under snow-white hair, and with features so finely outlined as to appear almost feminine. A pair of large, liquid eyes, a voice soft and musical, small delicate hands, and a graceful modesty of demeanour, bespoke him a person of refinement—in short, a gentleman.

The fact of his speaking English, though not very fluently, being an accomplishment rare among his countrymen, betokened intellectual culture, perhaps foreign travel—an idea strengthened by his general manner and bearing. There was something in his looks, moreover, that led me to think he must be clever in his calling.

I bethought me of the invalid inside the tent. Carlos might stand in need of his skill.

I was about to summon him back, when the young girl, hurrying out, anticipated my intention. She had overheard the dialogue between the new-comer and myself, and, thinking only of her brother, had rushed forth to claim the services of the *surgeon*.

"Oh, Señor," she cried, making the appeal to myself. "will you call him back to—to see Carlos?"

"I was about to do so," I replied. "He is coming!"

I had not even the merit of summoning the medic. On hearing her voice he had stopped and turned round, his attendants imitating his example. The eyes of all were concentrated on the Jarocho.

"Señorita," said the surgeon, stepping towards the tent and modestly raising his sombrero as he spoke, "so fair a

flower is not often found growing upon the ensanguined field of battle. If I have overheard you aright, it is your wish I should see some one who is wounded—some one dear to you, no doubt?"

"My brother, sir."

"Ah! your brother," said the Mexican, regarding the girl with a look that betokened a degree of surprise. "Where may I find him?"

"In the tent, señor. Calros, dear Calros! there is a medico, a real surgeon, coming to see you."

And as the girl gave utterance to the words she stepped quickly inside the marquee, followed by the surgeon himself.

CHAPTER XII.

A SIDE CONVERSATION.

I WAS about to enter after them, when some words spoken by one of the attendants, who had drawn nearer to the tent, arrested my steps, causing me to remain outside.

"It's Lola Vergara," said the speaker; "that's who it is. Any one who has had the good fortune to see that *muchacha* once, won't be likely to forget *her* face, and won't object to look at it a second time."

"You're right in what you say, Anton Chico. I know one who, instead of disliking to look at her beautiful countenance, would give an *onza* for a single glance at it. *Carrambo!* that he would."

"Who—who is he?" asked several of the party.

"That big captain of *guerilleros*—Rayas, his name. I know he'd like to see her."

"Why, her brother belonged to his *cuadrilla*; and the girl was with him in the camp. I saw her myself, not three days ago, down by Puente Nacional."

"That's quite true!" assented the speaker who had endorsed the declaration of Anton Chico.

"She was with the army for some days, along with the other women that followed Rayas's troop. But then all at once she was missed, and nobody knew where she went to. Capitan Rayas didn't, I know; or why should he have offered an onza to any one who would tell him?"

"He made that offer?"

"*Verdad!* I heard him."

"To whom?"

"To that ugly *zambo* you've seen skulking about the camp—who belongs to nobody. It was at the Puente Nacional, as I have said. I was standing under the bridge—the dry arch at the further end. It was just after dark; when, who should come there but Capitan Rayas, and the *zambo* following him. They were talking about this very *niña*: and I heard her name more than once. I did not hear much, for I had to keep a good distance off, so that they might not see me. But I heard that."

"What?"

"What I've said about the offer of the onza. 'Find out, Santucho,' said Rayas—Santucho is the *zambo*'s name—'find out where he has hid her.'"

"Who has hid her?"

"*Carrambo!* that's what I couldn't make out; but who, if it wasn't her own brother?—Calros, they call him."

"There's something ugly in all that," remarked one of the men.

"It isn't the *niña*, that's certain," jocularly rejoined Anton Chico.

"The zambo, then! he's ugly enough. What say you, camarados?"

"The patron, who wanted to employ him, is no great beauty himself," said one who had not before spoken. Notwithstanding his fine trappings, he has got some black marks against him. Look here, *hombres*," continued the speaker, drawing nearer to the others, and adopting a more confidential tone. "I'm a blind man, if I haven't seen his phiz before; aye, and *tapado* at that."

"Tapado?" echoed several.

"With black crape! It was only on my last trip but one up the country. I went with the *recua* of José Villares. He carried goods for that English house—you know—in the Calle do Mercaderos. Well, we were stopped at the Piñal, between Perote and Puebla; every mule stripped of its *carga*; and every man of us, with José himself, obliged to lie with our mouths to the grass, till the rascals had rifled the *recua*. They took only what was most valuable and easiest carried; but, *carrambo*! it well nigh ruined poor José; he has never been the same *aniero* since."

"What of all that, hombre?" inquired one, who seemed to be still unsatisfied. "What has that to do with the Capitan Rayas?"

"Ah! I forgot," said the accuser; "it was of the Capitan Rayas we were speaking. Well, it has this to do with him. The *salteadores* were all tapado, with black crape over their faces, their captain like the rest; but while he was engaged examining some papers he took from José, I caught a glance of his ugly countenance—just enough to know it again. If it wasn't the same I saw the other day when I met this Rayas in the camp, then I don't know *chingarito* from holy water. I'll answer for it from the

chin up to the eyes. Above that I didn't see it, for the tapado was over it."

"Bah!" exclaimed one of the men, who appeared to be of easy conscience himself; "what if the Capitan Rayas has done a little business on the road? There are officers in our army of higher rank than he who've cried out, '*Boca abajo!*'—aye, some that are now generals!"

"Hush, camarade!" interrupted one who stood nearest the speaker. "See, the medico's coming out. *Guardate, guardate!* it's treason you're talking!"

The interest with which I had listened to this singular palaver, had hindered me from entering the tent. The men had spoken loud enough for me to overhear every word—no doubt under the supposition that I did not understand their language—and to keep them in this belief, I had made pretence of being engaged in a whispering conversation with one of my own troopers who stood near.

As the return of the medico put an end to the talking of his attendants, I advanced to meet him, and inquired the condition of his patient.

"Thanks to your care, cavallero, he is out of danger from his wound. But from what he has confided to me—and to you also, I believe—he will be in danger of another kind by remaining in this place."

I could tell from this speech that Calros had communicated to the surgeon the incidents of the preceding night.

"How long do you keep guard here?" inquired the Mexican, with an abstracted air.

"I am under orders to strike tents and march—exactly at noon."

"To Jalapa, I presume?"

"To Jalapa."

"In that case this young fellow must be carried back to

the village of El Plan. A body of your troops will likely remain there for some time?"

"I believe that is the intention of our commander-in-chief."

"Then the invalid would be safer there. It will do him no harm, if taken upon a stretcher. I must lend him half-a-dozen of my assistants, or pick up some stragglers to perform this service."

"He would be safer in Jalapa?" I suggested, interrogatively. "Besides, the climate of Jalapa is much more favourable to the healing of wounds—is it not?"

"That is true," answered the man of science; "but Jalapa is distant. We have not a single ambulance in our army. Who is to carry him there—a poor soldier?"

"A fine young fellow, notwithstanding. My men would not mind the trouble of taking him, if you think——"

I looked round, in hopes that the proposal might be heard and approved by another.

The Jarocha was standing in the entrance of the tent, her face beaming with gratitude. No doubt it was due to the assurance which the surgeon had given her of her brother's speedy recovery; but I fancied I could perceive, in the sparkle of her beautiful eyes, a smile indicative of consent to what I had proposed.

The surgeon comprehended not the cause of my friendly interest in the welfare of the wounded Jarocha.

Did Lola comprehend it? Did she suspect it? Endowed with the keen, delicate instincts of her race, it was probable she did; at least, I fancied so, from the kindly look with which she had listened to my suggestion.

After all, it might have been gratitude for my friendly intentions, and nothing more.

"I see no objection to his going up the road," said the

surgeon, after having spent some little time in considering. "It is very kind on your part, cavallero," added he—"a stranger and an enemy." Here the medico smiled. "It is only a continuation of your humane exertions during the past night."

A smile, almost imperceptible, accompanied this last observation, together with the slightest raising of his eyes towards the Jarocha.

"Suppose," said he, continuing his speech, and relieving me from some little embarrassment, "suppose we consult the wishes of the invalid himself. What say you, señorita?"

"*Gracias, ñores*," replied the girl. "I shall ask brother Calros."

"Calros!" she called out, turning her face towards the tent. "The young officer who has been so kind to you proposes to have you carried up the road to Jalapa. Would you like to go there? The medico says the air of Jalapa will be better for you than this place."

With a fast-beating pulse I listened for the response of the invalid.

It was delayed. Calros appeared to be considering.

"Why?" I asked myself.

"*Ay de mi!*" broke in the voice of his sister, in a tone of ingenuous reflection. "It is very hot at El Plan."

"Thanks, sweet Lola!" I mentally exclaimed, and listened for the decision of Calros, as a criminal waiting for his verdict.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GROUP OF JAROCHOS.

HAD the wounded man been left free to choose, he would in all probability have decided in favour of being taken to Jalapa—that sanatorium for invalids of the *tierra caliente*.

I know not whether he had resolved the matter in his mind, but if so, the resolution rose not to his lips ; for, as I stood over his couch, venturing to add my solicitations to that *naïve* insinuation of his sister, I heard voices outside the tent—voices of men who had just come up—inquiring for “Calros Vergara.”

“Hola !” cried the Jarocho, recognizing the voices, “those are our friends, sister—people from Lagarto. Run out, niña, and tell them I am here !”

Lola glided towards the entrance of the tent.

“’Tis true, Calros,” she cried, as soon as she had looked out. “I see Vicente Vilagos, Ignacio Valdez, Rosario Tres Villas, and the little Pablito !”

“Gracias a Dios !” exclaimed the invalid, raising himself on the *catre*. “I should not wonder if they’ve come to carry me home.”

“That’s just what we’ve come for,” responded a tall, stalwart specimen of a Jarocho, who at that moment stepped inside the tent, and who was hailed by the invalid as “Vicente Vilagos.” “Just that, Calros ; and we’re glad to learn that the Yankee bullet has not quite stopped your breath. You’re all right, hombre ! So the medico outside has been telling us ; and you’ll be able, he says, to make the journey to Lagarto, where we’ll carry you as gingerly as a game cock ; aye, and the niña, too, if she will only sit astride of my shoulders. Ha ! ha ! ha !”

By this time the other Jarochos, to the number of six or seven, had crowded inside the tent, and surrounded the *catre* in which lay their countryman—each grasping him by the hand on arriving within reach ; and all saluting Lola with an air of *chevalresque* gracefulness worthy of the days of the Cid !

I stood aside—watching with curious interest this interchange of friendly feeling ; which partook also of a *national* character : for it was evident that the visitors of Calros were all of the Jarochos race.

I had another motive for observing their movements, far stronger than that of mere curiosity. I looked to discover if among the new-comers I could recognize a rival !

I watched the countenance of Lola more than theirs, scrutinizing it as each saluted her. I felt happy in having observed nothing—at least nothing that appeared like a glance of mutual intelligence. They were all thin, sinewy fellows, dark-skinned and dark-haired, having faces such as Salvator Rosa would have delighted to commit to canvas, and pointed chin-beards, like those painted by Vandyke.

None of them appeared to be over thirty years of age. Not one of them was ill-looking ; and yet there was not one who inspired me with that unpleasant feeling too often the concomitant of love.

From all that I had yet seen, the rivalry of Rayas, Calros's enemy, was more to be dreaded than that of any of his friends.

Vicente Vilagos was the oldest of the party, and evidently their leader *pro tem*.

It was no longer a question of carrying Calros to Jalapa. That, to his friends, would have appeared absurd—perhaps not the less so were Lola to urge it.

She said nothing, but stood apart. I fancied she was not too content at their coming, and the fancy was pleasant to me !

Surrounded by her enthusiastic friends, for a time I could not find an opportunity of speaking with her. I endeavoured to convey intelligence with my eyes.

The Jarochoes are sharp fellows ; skilled in courtesy, and thorough adepts in the art of love. I had reason to be careful. My peculiar position was against me, as it marked me out for their observation.

Their glances, however, were friendly. They had gathered some particulars of what had passed between their compatriot and myself.

"Come !" said Vilagos, after some minutes spent in arranging their plans. "'Tis time for us to take the road. 'Twill be sundown before we can rest under the palm-trees of Lagarto."

The poetical phraseology did not surprise me : I knew it was *Jarocho*.

Calros had been placed upon a stretcher ; and his bearers had already carried him outside the tent. Some broad leaves of the banana had been fixed over him as an awning, to shelter him from the rays of the sun.

"*Ñor deconocio*," said Vilagos, coming up to me, and frankly extending his hand. "You've been kind to our *con-paisano*, though you be for the time our enemy. That, we hope, will soon pass ; but whether it be in peace or in war, if you should ever stray to our little *rancheria* of Lagarto, you will find that a Jarocho can boast of two humble virtues—*gratitud y hospitalidad ! Adios !*"

Each of the companions of Vilagos parted from me with an almost similar salutation.

I would have bidden a very different sort of adieu to

Dolores, but was hindered by the presence of her friends, who clustered around.

I could find opportunity for only four words :

“*Lola ! I love you !*”

There was no reply ; not a word, not a whisper that reached me ; but her large dark orbs, like the eyes of the *mazame*, flashed forth a liquid light that entered my soul, like fire from Cupid’s torch.

I was half delirious as I uttered the “*adios.*” I did not add the customary “*Va con Dios !*” nor yet the “*hasta luego*”—the “*au revoir*” of the Spanish, for which our boorish Saxon vocabulary has no synonym.

Notwithstanding the omission, I registered a mental vow—to see *Lola Vergara* again.

* * * * *

The beautiful Jarocha was gone from my sight !

“Shall I ever see her again ?”

This was the interrogatory that came uppermost in my thoughts—not the less painful from my having perceived that she had lingered to look back.

Would she have preferred the road to Jalapa ?

Whether or not, I had the vanity to think so.

Gone, without leaving me either promise or souvenir—only the remembrance of her voluptuous beauty—destined long to dwell within the shrine of my heart.

“Shall I ever see her again ?”

Once—twice—thrice—involuntarily did I repeat the self-interrogation.

“Perhaps never !” was each time the equally involuntary reply.

In truth, the chances of my again meeting with her were very slight. To this conclusion came I, after a calm

survey of the circumstances surrounding me. True, I had obtained the name of her native village—El Lagarto—and had registered a mental resolve to visit it.

What of that? A long campaign was before me, leading me in the opposite direction. The chances of being killed, and surviving it, were almost equally balanced in the scale. With such a prospect, when might I stray towards Lagarto?

There was but one answer to this question within my cognizance: *whenever I should find the opportunity*. With this thought I was forced to console myself,

I stood with my eyes fixed upon the turning of the road, where the overhanging branches of the acacias, with cruel abruptness, shrouded her departing figure from my sight. I watched the *grecque* bordering upon her petticoat, as the skirt swelled and sank, gradually narrowing towards the trees. I looked higher, and saw the fringed end of the reboso flirted suddenly outward, as if a hand, rather than the breeze, had caused the motion. I looked still higher. The face was hidden under the scarf. I could not see that, but the attitude told me that her head must be turned, and her eyes, "*mirando atras!*"

Kissing my hand, in answer to this final recognition, was an action instinctive and mechanical.

"I've been a fool to permit this parting—perhaps never to see her again!"

This was the reflection that followed.

I entered the tent, and flung myself upon the *catre* lately occupied by the invalid.

A sleepless night, caused by excited passions, succeeding another passed equally without sleep, in which I had toiled, taking those useless howitzers up the steep slopes of El Plan—had rendered me somnolent to an extreme de-

gree ; and spite the chagrin of that unsatisfactory separation, I at length gave way to a god resistless as Cupid himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INFAMOUS EPISTLE.

THERE is an interest—will any man deny it?—in awaking from one's slumber, and finding that the postman has *been* ; the fact made manifest by the presence of an epistle lying proximate to your pillow, and within reach of your hand.

It is an interest of a peculiarly pleasant nature, if the epistle be perfumed, the envelope of limited dimensions, crested, cream-laid, and endorsed by a chirography of the “angular” type.

The effect, though sometimes as startling, is not quite so pleasant, when the “cover” is of a bluish tint, the superscription “clerkly,” and, instead of a crest enstamped upon the seal, you read the cabalistic words, “Debt, Dunn, & Co.”

As I awoke from my matutinal slumber—under canvas that had sheltered his Excellency Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna—my eyes looked upon a letter, or something that resembled one.

The sight inspired me neither with the thought which would have been suggested by a *billet-deux* nor a *dun*, but yet with an interest not much yielding to either ; for in the superscription placed fair before my eyes I read the full cognomen and titles of the Mexican tyrant :—

“*Al excellentissimo Señor, Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, General en gefe del Ejercito Mexicano.*”

The presence of the epistle was easily explained ; for I was lying on the camp bedstead upon which, the night before, had reclined the despot of Anahuac—perhaps after sleeping less tranquilly than I. Protruding from under the leathern *catre* was the letter, where it had, in all probability, been deposited after perusal.

On perceiving it, my feeling was one of curiosity—perhaps something more. I was, of course, curious to peruse the correspondence of an individual, in my way of thinking, more notorious than distinguished. At the same time a vague hope had entered my mind, that the envelope enclosed some private despatch, the knowledge of which might be of service to the Commander-in-chief of the American army,

I had no scruples about reading the epistle—not the slightest. There was no seal to be broken ; and if there had been, I should have broken it without a moment's hesitation.

The letter was addressed—in no very fair hand—to an enemy, not only of my nation, but, as I deemed him, an enemy of mankind.

I drew the sheet from its cover—a piece of coarse foolscap, folded note fashion. The writing was in pencil, and just legible.

“Excellentissimo Señor !—La niña se huye del campamento. Es cierto que la ha mandado el hermano. Ha recibido la putita las propuestas de V. E. con muchas señales de civilidad. No tenga V. cuidado. Yo soy alerta. En buen tiempo, dormira ella en la tienda y los brazos de V. E. o no esta mia nombre.

“RAMON RAYAS.”

Literal translation :—

“Most Excellent Sire !—The young girl has disappeared

from the camp—assuredly by the command of her brother. The ‘putita’ (a word not to be translated) listened to the proposal of your Excellency with much show of complaisance. Don’t have any disquietude about the result. I am on the alert. In good time she shall sleep in the tent and arms of your Excellency, or my name isn’t

“RAMON RAYAS.”

* * * * *

Whatever of sleep was left in my body or brain, was at once dispelled by the reading of this disgusting epistle. I had not the slightest doubt as to whom it referred. “La niña” could be no other than Dolores Vergara.

There might be other niñas following the Mexican army who had brothers, but the communication of Rayas pointed to one who had lately disappeared from the camp—a circumstance identifying her with the sister of Calros.

Besides, what other was likely to have tempted the cupidity of the tyrant—his lust (for it was clearly such a passion), which his pander had promised to gratify?

I was less surprised by the contents of the epistle than by the circumstances under which I had found it, and the peculiar coincidences that rendered its contents so easy of interpretation.

The character of Santa Anna—well known to me as to others—was in exact keeping with what might be inferred from the communication of his correspondent. Lascivious to an extreme degree, his amatory intrigues have been as numerous as his political machinations. At least half the leisure of his life has been devoted to dallying with the Delilahs of his land, of whom there is no scarcity.

Even the loss of his leg—shot off at the siege of Vera Cruz by Joinville—failed to cure him of his erotic propensities. At the time of which I speak—nearly ten years

after having parted with his limb—he was still the same gay wooer of women ; though now, in his mature age, occasionally standing in need of the *alcohuete*, as well as the exercise of other vile influences.

Among these last, the bestowal of military commissions was well known to be one of his most common means of corruption ; and many a young *alferes* owed his *inglorious epaulette*—many a captain his command—to the questionable merit of possessing a pretty sister.

Such was Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, Dictator of Mexico, and “generalissimo” of her armies.

With this knowledge of his character, I felt but little surprised at the contents of that “confidential” epistle. Nor was my contempt for him to whom it was directed so strong as it might have been, had my conscience been clear. In the impurity of my own thoughts, I was neither qualified to judge, nor privileged to condemn, the iniquities of another.

I could scarcely conceive how any one could look upon Lola Vergara without being inspired with a wish to become either her husband or her lover ; and as *El Cojo*—already *wived*—could not be the former, it was but natural for such a man, placed in his all-commanding position, to indulge in the hopeful anticipation of being accepted as the latter.

With shame I confess it, I felt but little surprise at the discovery of this intrigue ; and if I felt contempt, it was less for the sin itself, than for the way in which it was intended to be committed. With this sort of despite I was sufficiently inspired, extending equally to the patron and the panderer.

“Cowardly wretches !” I involuntarily exclaimed, crushing the piece of paper between my fingers ; “both villains

alike! And the brute Rayas! who talked of loving—of becoming *himself* her husband! Ha! No doubt would he do so: to obtain a better price for his precious commodity. Double dastard! It is difficult to believe in such infamy!”

For some time I strode backward and forward across the floor of the tent, muttering such speeches, and giving way to such thoughts.

Mingling with my disgust for the tyrant and his pimp, there was another feeling that caused me acute pain. Had the wretch any right to apply that vile epithet “putita?” Was there any truth in his statement that she had listened *with complaisance* to the proposals of V. E.—proposals of the nature of which there could be no misconception?

Notwithstanding the source from which the insinuation came, I will not deny that, at the moment it caused me suspicions, and something more—something very like *chagrin*.

It was less the knowledge of Lola’s character—of which I could know but little—than that of her countrywomen, that inspired me with this suspicion. Moreover, it was difficult to conceive how one so lovely and loveable could have lived to her age under the burning skies of the *tierra caliente*, without having loved.

That she *had been loved*, there could be little doubt. As little, that her lovers were legion. Could it be doubted that of some one of them she had reciprocated the passion? After the age of twelve the heart of a Jarocha rarely remains unimpressed. Lola appeared to be sixteen.

The disquietude of my thoughts admonished me that I too loved this Mexican maiden. The very pain of my suspicions told me I could not help loving her, *even if assured that they were true!*

My passion, if impure, was also powerful. The imputa-

tion cast upon its object in the letter of the *alcohuete*, instead of stifling, served only to fan it to a fiercer flame ; and under the impression that the slanderer might have spoken the truth, I only blamed myself for having behaved towards the beautiful Jarocha with a respect that might, after all, in her eyes have seemed superfluous.

I was not so wicked as to give way to these gross ideas for any continued length of time ; and as my memory dwelt upon her fair face ; on her eyes of angelic expression ; on the modest gracefulness of demeanour that marked her every movement ; above all, on the devoted fondness of which her brother was the object, I could not think that Lola Vergara was otherwise than what she seemed—an angel of innocence ; and that her brutal asperser was exactly what *he* seemed—a demon of the darkest dye.

Under the influence of these less degrading reflections, my spirits became calmer ; and I could ponder with less bitterness upon the contents of that infamous epistle.

Infamy it revealed of the deepest character, on the part of both writer and recipient, but nothing to compromise the character of the Jarocha : for the insinuation of Rayas might have been made either to flatter the vanity, or soothe the impatience, of his patron ; and in all likelihood one or the other—perhaps both—was its true purpose.

One fact, made evident by the communication, gave me disquietude of another kind. Whether the heart of Lola Vergara was still safe, certain it was that her *honour* was in danger. The brutal ruffian who would have murdered her brother, his old school-mate, on the field of battle, was not likely to stick at trifles of any kind, as I knew neither would he who was to reward him for the procuration. The assassin in intent, if not in reality, was not likely to be deterred by an abduction.

I could not help feeling serious apprehension for the safety of the girl, having only her invalid brother, a mere youth, to protect her. With the robber at large, and the patron still retaining a certain degree of power, the life of the brother was scarcely more secure than the chastity of the sister.

It was true that the arch-contriver, now a fugitive from the field, was likely for some time to have his hands full of other and very different work, than that of effecting the ruin of a peasant girl. But the subordinate would still be upon the spot; and even without the cheering presence of his employer, or the prospect of speedy reward, he might have views of his own, equally affecting the welfare of Lola Vergara.

I was so much disquieted by these apprehensions, that I had ordered my horse, with the design of galloping down the road, if possible overtaking the cortége which accompanied the invalid, and making known both to him and to his sister the scheme I had so unexpectedly discovered!

They had been gone some four or five hours; but, from the slow progress a stretcher must make, they would not likely have been more than as many miles beyond the bridge of El Plan. There could be no difficulty in overtaking them.

After all, what good could come of it? I might put them on their guard; but surely they had received warning already—sufficient to stimulate them to the utmost caution?

Moreover, the Jarocho would be in his own village, surrounded by his friends—I saw he had friends. What danger, then, either to himself or to his sister?

My apprehensions were unreasonable; and perhaps my

horse had been saddled as much from another motive, which I need not declare.

She might comprehend it, and to my prejudice—perhaps deem me importunate? She must have known all that I could tell her—perhaps more? Ah! true. She might not thank me for my interference.

As I stood hesitating between these two conflicting emotions, I was admonished that the hour was nigh, at which we had been ordered to strike tents, and march to join the head-quarters of the American army, by this time established in the town of Jalapa.

My troopers were forming on the field, preparatory to taking the route; and this among other motives decided my course of action.

Just as the sun had reached his meridian height, the bugler sounded the "*forward!*" and riding at the head of my little troop, I bade adieu to Cerro Gordo, now sacred to the god of war, but in my mind to remain hallowed as the spot upon which I had worshipped a far more agreeable divinity.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

UP the road from Cerro Gordo we travelled upon the track of a routed army.

All had not made good their retreat, as was evidenced by many a sad spectacle that came under our eyes as we went onward.

Here lay the dead horse, sunblown to enormous dimensions, with one leg—a hind one—stiffly projecting into the air.

Not far off might be seen the corpse of his quondam rider, in like manner swollen—bloated to the very tips of the fingers—so that the latter scarcely protruded from the palms, that more resembled boxing-gloves than the hands of a human being!

Though only thirty hours had elapsed from the time that life had left them, this curious transformation had become complete. It was owing to the tropical sun, which for the whole of the previous day had been fiercely glaring upon the bodies.

I noted, as we passed, that our slain enemies had not been unheeded. All appeared, since death, to have been visited, and attended to—not for the purpose of interment, but of plunder.

Everything of value found upon the corpses had been stripped off; in the case of some, even to their vestments.

A few were stark naked—their swollen shining skins displaying the gore-encircled *embouchure* of sabre or shot-wound; and it was only those whose torn uniforms were saturated with black blood, who had been permitted to retain the rags that enveloped them—now stretched to such a tight fit, that it would have been an impossibility to have completed the process of stripping.

To the credit of the pursuing army be it told, that this ruthless spoilation was not the work of the American soldier. A part of it may have been performed by the stragglers of that army—in nine cases out of ten a European hireling—French, Irish, or German. Myself an Irishman, I can scarcely be charged with partiality in this statement. Alas! for the land of my nativity—whose moral sense has too long suffered from the baneful taint of monarchical tyranny! I but set forth the facts as I saw them.

It was no great consolation to know, that much of that

spoilation had been done by Mexicans themselves—the patrolled prisoners, who had gone up the road before us.

The same deteriorating influence had been at work upon *their* moral principles for a like period of time ; and the intermittent glimpses they had got of a republic, had been too evanescent to have left behind much trace of its civilizing power.

As we rode onward among the unburied dead, I was impressed by a singular circumstance. The corpse of no Mexican appeared to have suffered mutilation ; while that of an American soldier, who had fallen by some stray shot, was stripped of its flesh—almost to the making a skeleton of it !

It was the work of wolves—we had no doubt about that. We several times saw the coyotes skulking under the edge of the chapparal, and at a greater distance the gaunt form of the large Mexican wolf. We saw great holes eaten in the hips of horses and mules ; but not a scratch upon the corpse of a Mexican soldier !

“Why is it ?” I asked of a singular personage who was riding immediately behind me, unattached to my troop, and whose experience over Texan and New Mexican battle-fields I presumed would help me to an explanation. “Why is it that the wolves have left *their* bodies untouched ?”

“Wagh !” exclaimed the individual thus interrogated, with an expression of scornful *disgust* suddenly overspreading his features. “Wolves eat ’em ! No—nor coyot’s neyther. A coyot won’t eat skunk ; an’ I reck’n thur karkidges aint less bitterer than the meat o’ a skunk.”

“You think there’s something in their flesh that the wolves don’t relish—something different from that of other people ?”

“Think ! I’m sartin sure o’t. I’ve see’d ’em die whar

we killed 'em—when the Texans made thur durned foolish expedishun northart to Santa Fe'. I've seed 'em lyin' out in the open paraira, for hul weeks at a time, till they had got dry as punk—jest like them things they bring from somewhar way out t'other side of the world. Durn it, I dis-remember the name o' the place, an' the things themselves. You know what I'm trackin' up, Bill Garey? We seed 'em last time we wur at Sant Looney—in that ere queery place, whur they'd got Ingun things, an' stuffed bufflers, an' the like."

"Mummeries?" replied the person thus appealed to, another unattached member of the corps of *rifle-rangers*. "Are that what you're arter, old Rube?"

"Preezackly, Bill. Mum'ries; aye, the name war that—I reccelex it. They gits the critters out o' lurge stone buildin's, shaped same as the rockly islands we seed, when we were trappin' that lake out t'ords California."

"Pyramids!" exclaimed the old trapper's companion, in a tone indicative of a more enlightened mind. "Pyramids o' Eegip! That's where they get 'em—so the feller sayed, as showed 'em to us."

"Wal, wherever they gets 'em. I don't care a durn whur; but es I wur tellin' the capten, I've seed dead Mexikins as like them mum'ries as one buffler air to another. I've seed 'em lie out thur on the dry paraira, an' neer a coyot, nor a wolf, nor even a turkey-buzzart go near 'em, let alone eat o' thur meat. That's what I've seed, and so've you, Bill Garey."

"Ye're right, old hoss; I've seed what you says."

"Wagh! what, then?" interrogated the first speaker, "what do ye konklude from thet?"

"Wal," drawlingly responded his younger compeer; "I shed say by that thet thar meat warnt eatable, nohow."

"Ah! there you'd be right, Bill Garey. There ain't a critter on all the paraira as will stick a tooth into the meat o' a reg'lar Mexikin. Coyot won't touch it; painter won't go near it; or buzzart, that'll eat the durndest gurbage as ever wur throwed out o' a tent,—even to the flesh o' a Injun—won't dig its bill into the karkidge o' a yeller-belly. I've seed it, an' I knows it."

"Well," I said, yielding to a belief in this curious theory—not propounded to me for the first time—"how do you account for this predilection, or rather *degoût*, on the part of the predatory animals?"

"Digou!" replied the old trapper; "if ye mean by that 'ere a hanger agin 'em, 'taint nothin' o' the sort. It be the pure stink o' the anymal as keeps 'em off. How ked they be other'ise, eatin' nothin' but them red peppers, an' thur garlic, an' thur half-rotten jirk-meat? 'Taint a bit strange, I reckon, that neyther wolf nor buzzarts 'll have anythin' to do wi' their karkidges. Is it, Billee?"

"No," replied the individual thus appealed to; "not a bit, though some other sort o' anymal 'haint been so pertikler. If their skins haint been touched, somebody's been tolerable close to 'em, an' taken thar shirts. I calclate it's been some o' thar own people as have jest gone up the road."

"An' maybe some o' ourn as well," rejoined the old trapper, with a significant leer upon his wrinkled features. "Some o' them don't appear to be much better than the Mexikins 'emselves. Look'ee there, Cap'n!"

The speaker gave a slight inclination of his head, accompanied by an equally slight wave of the hand.

I looked in the direction indicated by this double gesture; and at once comprehended the purport of his insinuation.

CHAPTER XVI

A BRACE OF BAD FELLOWS.

I WAS at the moment riding in the rear of my troop—having fallen back to hold conversation with my two unattached followers, thus incidentally introduced. The last trooper in the rank—except the corporal, who rode alongside of him—was a man of large body, somewhat slouched and unshapen; as were also his arms, limbs, and the forage-cap on his head. Altogether, he was a slovenly specimen for a cavalry soldier—to look at from behind; and his aspect from the front did not alter the impression.

A long cadaverous countenance, bedecked with a pair of hollow-glass-like eyes; a beard long as the face, hanging down over his breast, defiled with fragments of food and the “ambeer” of tobacco; behind which appeared a row of very large white teeth, set between lips of an unnaturally red colour; above these a long nose, broken near the middle, and obliquing outward to the sinister angle of his mouth;—such was the portrait presented by the individual in question.

I did not see his face, for I was behind him; but it did not need that to enable me to identify the man. By his back, or any part of his body, I could have told that the trooper before me was Johann Laundrich, the Jew-German.

“What of *him*?” I inquired, in an undertone, seeing that he was the individual referred to in the speech of the old trapper.

“Don’t ’ee see, Cap’n? them theer boots! I heern ye stopped ’im from takin’ ’em last night. He’s got ’em along wi’ him for all that. Thur they be!”

Rube's gesture was this time more definite ; and pointed to the cloak of the trooper, rolled and strapped to the cantle of his saddle.

Between the folds of the cloth, ill-adjusted as they were, I saw, protruding a few inches outward, something of a buff colour, that evidently did not belong to the garment.

A slight scrutiny satisfied me that it was a boot ; and, guided by what the trapper had said, I saw that it could be no other than one of the pair I had prevented Laundrich from pilfering from the corpse of the Mexican officer.

I had only hindered him for the time. He had evidently returned to the tent, and made a finish of his filthy work.

A loud angry "halt !" brought the troop to a stand.

I ordered Laundrich to ride out of the ranks ; unstrap his cloak from the saddle ; and spread it out. On his doing so, the buff boots fell to the ground—where they were permitted to lie.

I could not contain my temper at the double disobedience of orders ; and riding alongside the ruffian, I struck him over the crown with the flat of my sabre.

He made no movement to avoid the blow, nor did he stir on receiving it—further than to show his white teeth, like a savage dog suffering chastisement.

With Laundrich once more in the saddle, we were about to move on ; when the corporal, touching his cap, came up to me.

"Captain !" said he, "there's even worse than him among the men. There's one o' them got in his havresack a thing I think you ought to see. It's a scandal to the corps."

"Which one—who ?"

"Bully, the Englishman."

"Order Bully to ride this way."

The trooper thus designated, on being summoned by the corporal, drew his horse out of the rank, and rode up—though evidently with an awkward reluctance.

He was quite as ill-favoured as the delinquent just punished. His evil aspect was of a type altogether different. He was bullet-headed and bull-faced, with a thick fleshy neck, and jowls entirely destitute of beard; while, instead of being of dark complexion, like the Jew-German, his face was of the hue of dirty shining tallow, not *adorned* by a close crop of hay-coloured hair that came far down upon a low square forehead. His nose was retroussé, with nostrils widely spread, like those of a pure-bred bull dog; and his eyes were not very unlike the optics of the fierce Molossian.

The man was known by the name above given to him; though whether he answered to this appellation at roll-call, or whether it was only a sobriquet bestowed upon him by his comrades, I really do not now remember.

His appearance was simply stupid and brutal, while that of Laundrich was cunning and savage.

They were the two worst men in the troop; and I had reason to believe that both had been convicts in their respective countries; but this was not much in the ranks of a campaigning army.

“Bully!” I demanded, as he drew near; “let us see what you’ve got in your havresack!”

A hideous grin overspread the fellow’s features, as he proceeded to draw out the contents of the bag.

“What is it?” I inquired of the corporal, impatient to learn what could be carried in a cavalry havresack, calculated to set a stigma upon a whole troop.

“A piece o’ a man,” was the reply.

By this time Bully had produced the identical article.

Knowing what was wanted of him, he saw there would be no use in attempting to "dodge" the demand ; and, without troubling the other impedimenta, which the sack contained, he drew out only the article requiring inspection.

It was the finger of a man, encircled by a heavy gold ring, deeply embedded in the swollen flesh ! It had been cut off at the posterior joint, close to the hand ; and a portion of the muscle of the two adjacent fingers was still attached to it. All this had been done to secure the ring which could not, without breaking it, have been detached from the finger.

The sight, taken in connection with the history deduced from its being in possession of the trooper, was sufficiently horrible.

I did not allow my eyes to dwell upon it ; and the shower of blows which I administered to the inhuman scoundrel were not the less heavily dealt on my being told that the finger had belonged to the same corpse which Laundrich had despoiled of its boots !

Ordering the fragment of humanity to be brought along—with the design of some day sending the ring to the friends of the mutilated man—I resumed the route ; painfully impressed with the disagreeable circumstances, which had thus disturbed the tranquillity of my temper.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RIDERLESS HORSE.

WE halted about midway on the road to Jalapa, at a place called *Corral Falso*, which, literally translated, signifies "The False Enclosure."

I know not why the name ; but certain it is, that a large enclosure of mason work, with a portion of it in ruins, occupied the summit of the slight eminence where the village stands.

This enclosure may have been a "corral" or penn for cattle, or perhaps a "paraje" for pack mules ; though it seemed to be no longer used for any purpose—as it exhibited the appearance of a ruin overgrown with bushes and rank weeds.

The village itself may also have seen more prosperous days—in the times of vice-regal rule—but Corral Falso, on the occasion of my making halt in it, was nothing more than a very small collection of huts, constructed out of tree poles—"Jacales"—and constituting that grouping, known in Mexico as a *rancheria*—a collection of "ranchos."

The vanquished army, in its retreat, as well as the victors in their pursuit having passed through the place, had temporarily deprived Corral Falso of its inhabitants. They had taken to the wild chapparal which grew close to their village ; and there had they hidden themselves.

But since then a whole day had intervened ; and hunger had forced them back to their despoiled homes—at the same time inspiring them with courage to stay there, or at all events with a repugnance to return to the starving shelter of the chapparal.

We found the Corral Falsenians at home—of both sexes and of all ages—all alike trembling at our approach, and evidently gratified to find that we did not eat them up !

I have given this prominence to the pretty *paraje* Corral Falso, not out of any consideration for the place itself, but on account of an incident that transpired there, which resulted in my losing two of my men ; and—which was of

far more importance to me—was very nearly ending in the loss of myself!

We had halted to “bait” our animals—from their own nosebags of course: for there was not as much corn in Corral Falso as would have filled the crop of a chicken.

While thus occupied, it was reported to me—that one of the horses would not eat; but on the contrary, was more likely to die.

He had been stricken by the sun, or had got the staggers from some other unexplained cause; which ended by his tumbling over upon the road, and stretching out his limbs in their last tremulous struggle.

The horse belonged to the lieutenant of my troop; who was now, of course, *démonté*.

Slight as the *contretemps* may appear, or might have been under other circumstances, it placed us at the time in somewhat of a dilemma. One of the men would have to be dismounted, in order that the officer might ride; but how was the man to be taken along? I had been ordered to report speedily at head-quarters in Jalapa; and to have marched at such a pace as would allow one on foot to keep up with the troop, was entirely out of the question.

It is true that the dismounted trooper might be carried on the croup of one of his comrades' horses; but all of these were greatly fatigued by a long-continued spell of duty; and it was just doubtful enough whether there was a horse in the *cavallada* capable of “carrying double.”

While my lieutenant and I were debating this question between us, fate or fortune seemed to have determined on deciding it in our favour.

I have said that the *chapparal* stretched in to the very confines of the rancheria—holding the little village, as it were, in its thorny embrace.

But the country around was not all of this character. The thicket was far from being continuous. On the contrary, the eye rested upon broad tracts of open pasture-ground, covered with a growth of tufted grass, here and there matted, with clumps of cactus, and plants of the wild agave bristling under their tall flower-stalks, and cymes of strong-scented blossoms.

It was not these curious forms of the botanical world that attracted our attention—we had seen and admired them before—but the hoof-strokes of a galloping horse, ringing, not upon the road that bisected the village, but upon the hard turf, that covered the surface of the soil in the open spaces extending between the copses of the chapparal.

We had scarcely bent our ears to listen to the sounds, when we saw the animal that was causing them—a horse—galloping down the slope of a hill in the direction of the rancheria.

He was saddled ; but without bridle, and without a rider !

The animal appeared to be a splendid *musteño*, of a steel-grey colour ; and the gleam of silver upon the mountings of the saddle bespoke him as belonging, or having belonged, to an owner of some consideration—perhaps an officer of rank.

The sight of a saddled but riderless steed, thus scampering across country, was by no means strange—at least to us *then* and *there*. More than one had we observed upon our march enjoying a like liberty—whose riders were perhaps, at that moment, coldly asleep upon the field of battle, never more to remount them.

We should scarcely have taken notice of the circumstance, but for the want which just then was making itself so un-

pleasantly felt. We wanted a horse to remount the lieutenant. Here was one about to offer himself ready saddled, and as if saying, "Come and bestride me!"

It was not so certain, however, that the mustang was thus generously disposed; and it became still less so, when the animal, after approaching within twenty paces of the troop, suddenly stopped, threw his nostrils into a horizontal position; loudly inhaled the air; and then with a terrific neigh turned in his tracks and galloped back up the acclivity of the hill.

In the *cavallada* of tall, scraggy steeds that stood in the street of the village with their noses buried eye-deep in canvas bags—he seemed not to have recognized his own species; or, if so, it was only to identify them as enemies.

The horses of the troop had taken no heed of the shy stranger. They were not in the humour for a "stampede." They did not even think it necessary to neigh, but remained tranquilly crunching their corn, as if aware that they were making only a temporary halt, and that their time was too precious to be spent in any other occupation.

On reaching the summit of the hill, the mustang came to a stand, and, with head high in air, screamed back a series of wild "whighers," as if uttered in mockery or defiance.

There was but one horse on the ground capable of capturing that mustang; and perhaps only one rider who could have conducted him to the capture.

Though laying myself open to the accusation of an inordinate vanity, I must specify the horse and the rider thus alluded to. The first was my brave steed *Moro*—the second was Captain Edward Warfield, in command of a "free corps of rangers."

An early practice of hare and fox hunting in my native

land—continued by the chase of the stag over the forest-clad slopes of the Alleghanies—had given me a seat in the saddle firm as its “tree,” and close as the skin that covered it ; while a still later experience on the great western prairies, had rendered me habile in the handling of that wonderful weapon of prairie and pampa—the *lazo*.

Habit had accustomed me to deem it almost as essential as my bridle ; never to go abroad without it ; and ever, while riding at the head of my troop of half guerilleros, half-regular cavalry—a coil of thin shining rope composed of twisted hair from the tails of horses, might have been seen hanging from the horn of my saddle.

I esteemed it an arm of equal service with my pistols, whose butts glistened in the holsters beneath. It could be seen in *Corral Falso* hanging over the withers of my steed, as he stood among the others quietly munching his maize.

My dismounted lieutenant had noticed it, and turned towards me with an appealing look, impossible to be misunderstood.

He liked the appearance of the steel-grey mustang ; and had become inspired with an insatiable longing to bestride it.

That longing could only be gratified by its capture ; and this could only be effected by myself and Moro.

I understood the lieutenant’s look. Perhaps my comprehension was quickened by the pride or vanity that fluttered up within my bosom at the moment—a desire for even that trifling triumph of distinguishing myself in the eyes of my own men.

I perceived that their eyes were upon me ; and, ordering my horse to be bridled, I leaped into the saddle, and started off in pursuit of the *escapado*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HORSE-HUNT.

MY steed seemed to comprehend the object for which I had mounted him. Without any guidance, either of voice or rein, he headed for the hill, upon the summit of which stood the neighing mustang.

I rode cautiously up the slope, keeping as well as I could under cover of the cactus plants, in hopes that I might get near enough to fling my lazo without fraying the animal I wished to capture.

There was but slight chance of my being able to accomplish this without a gallop.

The riderless horse was roused, and could not be approached unless by a ruse, or after being run down.

I could think of no trick beyond that of stealing upon the mustang through some trees near which he had stopped, and I rode towards them.

It was to no purpose. The animal having the advantage in position, could see me as I advanced up the acclivity. Before I had got half way to the trees, it turned tail towards me ; and, uttering a shrill scream, disappeared over the crest of the ridge.

Giving Moro a touch of the spur, I hastened on to the spot lately occupied by the escapado.

On reaching the summit I saw the mustang once more, but at a rather discouraging distance. It had made good use of the short time it had been out of sight—being now nearly half a mile off, and still going down the slope, which declined in the direction of the Rio del Plan.

I hesitated to follow. The pursuit might carry me far into the heart of the country, and away from the main

road. My time was precious. I had orders to report at head-quarters at an early hour of the evening. Cavalry were at that time scarce in the American army ; and even my "irregulars" might be required for some duty. I had not much discretionary control as to my movements ; and, with these reflections crossing my mind, I determined to return to my troop.

Rather should I say, I was about determining to do so, when a circumstance occurred that decided me to go on.

As I sat in my saddle, watching the fugitive mustang—expecting it soon to disappear into the woods at the bottom of the hill, all of a sudden the animal came to a halt, and, turning around and tossing its head high in the air, once more gave utterance to a shrill "whigher."

There was something in the neighing of the creature, as well as the movement that accompanied it, that seemed to say, "Come after me if you dare !"

At all events, I interpreted it as a challenge of this kind, and, in the excitement of the moment, I determined to accept it.

I was influenced, also, by the presence of my comrades, who were watching me from below.

Duty should have determined me to ride back to them, and resume our interrupted march ; but the chagrin which I should have felt in so easily abandoning a project I had taken up with such a show of determination, outweighed my sense of duty ; and, without further delay, I launched myself down the slope in pursuit of the fugitive horse.

As I drew near, the animal started off again ; but, instead of taking to the timber—as I expected it would have done—it kept along the edge of the wood, in a southeasterly direction.

This was just what I wanted. I believed that on open

ground—in a fair tail-on-end chase—I could overtake either it or any other mustang in Mexico ; and my hope was that it might give me a fair chance without taking to cover.

Although I had hunted its wild congeners on the prairies of Texas, it proved the swiftest thing in mustang shape I had ever followed, and I soon began to doubt my capacity to overtake it.

After I had ridden more than a mile along the edge of the forest timber, the creature seemed as far ahead of me as ever ! I was fast losing faith in the fleetness of Moro ; for I knew that he had been going at top speed all the time, while the mustang appeared to have preserved the distance with which it had started.

“It has heels equal to yours, Moro,” I said mutteringly to my own horse. “It will be a question of *bottom* between you.”

Was Moro stung by my reproach ? He seemed so. Perhaps my thoughts were his ? At all events I could feel him perceptibly mending his pace ; and perceived, moreover, that he was at last gaining ground upon the fugitive.

There was a natural reason for this, though I did not think of it at the moment. The first mile of the chase had been *down* hill—so much the worse for Moro. He was a true Arab ; his ancestors had been denizens of the great plains of the Sahara—a race of steeds famed for fleetness on the level course. The mustang, on the contrary, was by birth and habits a *mountaineer* ; and either *up* hill or *down* hill would have been the track of his selection.

Going down the slope, he had maintained his distance, or nearly so ; but now that the chase led along a level

tract of country, he was losing it length by length—so perceptibly, that I began to grope around the pommel of my saddle, to assure myself of the *readiness* of my lazo.

Perhaps another mile was passed over in the chase, without any change taking place ; except that I saw myself constantly closing in towards the heels of the riderless horse. Then a change did occur, and one altogether unexpected : the mustang suddenly disappeared from my sight !

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTOR CAPTURED.

THERE was nothing mysterious in the disappearance of the fugitive. It had simply made a turn to the right, and plunged, as I thought, into the forest, along the edge of which I had been hitherto pursuing it.

I declined taking the diagonal direction. By doing so I might have headed the mustang ; but I feared that the timber might mislead me, and I should lose the animal altogether.

I kept on, therefore, to the point where it had entered the wood.

On reaching this point, I perceived that I had been mistaken. The mustang had not entered the timber at all, but had turned into a sort of alley, or opening, among the trees—along which it was still going in full gallop, as when last seen.

I hesitated not to follow. I was by this time too much excited to think of consequences. Moro's spirit was, like my own, roused to a pitch closely bordering upon the reck-

less ; and on we went through the forest aisle—that appeared to grow gloomier the farther we penetrated under its shadows.

It was a forest of silk-cotton trees—as I could tell by the flossy down that lay scattered along the ground ; but while noting this, I saw something else of far greater significance—something, in fact, that seemed to whisper to me, “You are riding fast, but you may be riding too far.”

The thing that suggested this thought was an observation I made at the moment. Though going at full gallop along what appeared to be a natural avenue between the trees, I could not help perceiving that the ground under my horse’s feet was thickly imprinted with tracks. They were the hoof-prints of horses that, not long before, must have passed over it, going in the same direction as myself.

I might have taken them for a wild herd—the *cavallada* belonging to some grazing hacienda—of which there were more than one among the half-prairie chapparals that surrounded me ; but this conjecture was nipped in the bud, on my perceiving among the tracks more than one set made by horses, that had been handled by the *herradero*.

I knew that shod horses were rarely or never found in the grazing *cavallada* ; and therefore the large troop that had preceded me through the forest opening, must have had saddles upon their backs, and men bestriding them.

I had gone a good way into the timber before arriving at this conclusion.

I need not say that it affected my further advance. The horsemen who had trodden the track before me must be enemies ; they could not be friends. I was now full three miles from the main road—leading from Vera Cruz to Jalapa—and I knew that no troop of our cavalry had left it.

Besides, the shod-tracks I saw were those of mustangs, or Mexican horses—so much smaller in their circumference than those of the American horse, that I could note the difference, even in the glance allowed by the rapidity of my onward gallop.

Mexican cavalry must have passed over the ground, perhaps in retreat from the field of Cerro Gordo ; but even so, they might not have proceeded far, since they could have but little fear of our following them in that cross-country direction.

I was beginning to repent of my recklessness. Already my bridle-rein was, by a half-mechanical effort on my part, perceptibly becoming tighter along the neck of my steed, when the chase that had lured me so far, presented an aspect to seduce me still further.

I had been observing for some time that the mustang, although without a bridle in its mouth, carried one upon the pommel of its saddle. The reins were hanging in a loose coil over the "horn."

This half explained to me why the animal had been going across country without a rider. Had it been bridled, I should have concluded that it had left its owner upon the field of Cerro Gordo, or parted with him in the hot pursuit succeeding that action.

But a bridle suspended from the saddle-bow—with bit, curb, and head-piece attached—forbade the conjecture ; at the same time suggesting another : that the mustang must have made its escape from some temporary halting-place, where, like our own horses at Corral Falso, it had been unbridled to "bait."

It was not this conjecture that influenced me to continue the chase ; but the fact that the bridle-reins, suspended over the saddle-horn, had begun to trail among the ani-

mal's feet, and promised, ere long, to prove an impediment to its flight. It was my observation of this that lured me on.

Chance, not prowess, was likely to give me the victory, But what mattered it, so long as there would be no one to witness the event?

My comrades would not know how I had effected the capture ; and, instead of returning to them empty-handed—crest-fallen with chagrin—I should ride back in triumph ; and so should Moro, the steel-grey mustang following at his heels.

Inspired by this pleasant anticipation, I once more struck the spur into the flank of my brave steed, which needed not such prompting. It was merely mechanical. Perhaps Moro knew as much, and forgave me for the unnecessary infliction.

Quite unnecessary, as it proved ; for, at the very instant I was causing it, the riderless mustang, just as I had been wishing and expecting, became entangled in its trailing bridle, and rolled headlong upon the grass.

Before it could recover its legs, Moro was snorting by its side ; and Moro's rider, having forsaken his own steed, had looped the lazo around its neck, and secured it as a captive.

I was not left much time to congratulate myself on my good luck ; for, in truth, it was luck, and only that, to which I had been indebted for the capture of the mustang.

Having secured the animal, as I supposed to a certainty, I was proceeding to re-insert its own bit between its teeth, in order the more easily to lead it along with me on the return journey to Corral Falso.

I was even full of self-gratulation—chuckling over the

conquest I had accomplished—anticipating one of those pleasant little triumphs one feels on having performed a feat, however trifling, under the eyes of one's everyday associates.

I believed I should have nothing more to do than attach the captured mustang to the ring of my saddle-tree, remount my own steed, and ride back to the "false enclosure."

The "cup" was at my lips ; I had forgotten the "slip."

Literally may I say the "slip," though the word may need explanation

I was returning towards my own steed, with the intention of once more regaining my saddle, and riding back in the direction I had come, when a swishing noise fell upon my ear, that caused the blood to curdle within my veins, as if the sound so heard had been the summons of the last trumpet.

The wild cry that succeeded this sound added little to its terrors ; for I knew that one was but the prelude to the other.

The first was to me a noise well known and easily identified. It was the whistling of lazos projected through the air. The second was but the triumphant cheer that accompanied their projection.

I looked up in dismay, which instantly became despair. It was not causeless. The air above me was a network of ropes, each with a running noose at its end.

I might not have observed their intricate coiling, nor perhaps did I at the moment. I was not allowed much time for minute observation. Almost in the same instant that the "swishing" sounded in my ears, I felt my body encircled by closing cords ; and the next moment I was jerked from my feet, and flung with violence upon my back.

CHAPTER XX.

A CUADRILLA OF SALTEADORES.

SUDDEN as it was, and unexpected, there was no mystery in my capture. I had fallen into the hands of Mexicans, and, of course, enemies.

It was a party of horsemen, about forty in number—irregularly armed, but all armed one way or another. They must have seen me as I advanced up the long opening among the trees, though I had no idea that I had been observed by human eye.

Perhaps they had not seen me, but only received warning of my approach by hearing the hoof-strokes of my horse; or they might have seen the steed I was in pursuit of, before mine had made its appearance in the avenue.

At all events, they had been made aware of my coming in some way, and had thrown themselves into an ambush on both sides of the path.

Improbable as it might appear, I could not help fancying that the grey mustang had been sent forth as a “stool pigeon,” so well had the creature succeeded in decoying me into their midst.

I scrambled over the ground, and at length managed to recover my legs. On looking up, I saw that I was surrounded; and felt, moreover, that, although permitted to regain my feet, I was still tightly held in the loops of numerous lazos, which encircled my neck, arms, waist, and limbs.

Any attempt to get away from such multifarious fastenings would have been worse than idle, and could only result in my being plucked off my feet again, and perhaps treated with greater rudeness than before.

Knowing this, I surrendered without making the least movement or resistance.

It was a motley group in whose midst I stood : in this respect equalling a party of Guy Faux mimers. No two were dressed exactly alike, though there was a general similitude of costume among them, especially in the particular articles of broad-brimmed hats, and wide-legged trowsers of velveteen.

Some of them had *serapes* hanging scarf-like over their shoulders ; but all were armed with long knives (*machetés*), and lances ; I could also see short guns (*escopetas*) strapped along the sides of their saddles.

"A *guerilla*," I muttered to myself, thinking I had fallen among a band of guerilleros.

I was soon undeceived, and found I had not been so fortunate. The ruffian countenances of my captors—as soon as I had time to scrutinize them more closely—the coarse jests and ribald language passing between them, along with some other professional peculiarities—told me that, instead of a band of partisans, I was in the clutches of a *cuadrilla* of *salteadores*—true robbers of the road !

My observation of the fact was not calculated to tranquillize my spirits, but the contrary. As a general rule, the bandits of Mexico are not bloodthirsty. If the purse be freely delivered up to them, they have no object in ill-treating the person of their captives. It is only when the latter show ill-humour, or attempt resistance, that their lives are in danger.

At that time, however, with the country in a state of active war—with a hated enemy marching victorious along its roads—some of the outlawed chiefs had become inspired with a sort of sham patriotism—in most instances for the purpose of being left free to plunder, or else with the

design of obtaining pardon for past offences. Though occasionally acting as guerilleros, and attacking the wagon trains of the American army, their patriotism was of a very ambiguous order ; and not unfrequently were their own countrymen the victims of their despoiling propensities.

In one respect only did this patriotism display itself with partiality, and that was in the ferocity with which they treated such American prisoners as had the misfortune to fall into their hands. Horrible mutilations were common—with all the vindictive modes of punishment known to the *lex talionis*.

I could easily believe, while regarding the ferocious faces around me, that I was in great danger of some fearful fate : perhaps to be drawn and quartered ; perhaps burnt alive ; perhaps—I knew not what—I could only conjecture something terrible.

After I had been pulled about for some minutes, and rudely abused by several of the band, a man made his appearance in their midst, who seemed to exert over the others some species of authority. The word “capitan,” pronounced by several as he came forward, told me that he was the chief of the robbers ; and his appearance entitled him to the distinction.

He was a man of large frame, and swarthy complexion—heavily bearded and moustached. His dress was splendid in the extreme—being a full suit of *ranchero* costume, with all its ornamental trimming of gold lace, bell buttons, and needlework embroidery.

The countenance of this man might have been handsome, but for an expression of ferocity that pervaded it ; and this was so marked as at once to impress the beholder with the belief that it was the face of a fiend rather than of a human being.

A row of white teeth glistened under his coal-black moustache ; and these, as he came near the spot where I was held captive, were displayed, in what was intended for a smile of gratification, but which had all the characteristics of a grin.

I supposed at first that this gratification simply proceeded from his having made prisoner one of the enemies of his country. I had no idea that it could by any possibility have especial reference to myself.

One thing, however, struck me as peculiar. When the brigand spoke—addressing some words of direction to his subordinates—I fancied I had heard his voice before !

It fell on my ears without producing an agreeable impression. Rather the contrary ; but where I could have heard it, or why it should jar upon my ear, were questions I could not answer.

I had been a good deal among Mexicans of all classes—not only since the capture of Vera Cruz, but long before the commencement of the campaign. My knowledge of their language had naturally inducted me into a more extensive acquaintance with our enemies than was the lot of most of my comrades. For this reason it did not follow that the sound of a familiar voice should lead to the instant recognition of the man who uttered it—more especially as he from whom it proceeded was before my eyes in *propria persona*—the chief of a band of salteadores.

I scanned the robber's face with as much minuteness as circumstances would permit. I could not perceive in it a single feature that I remembered ever to have seen before.

Perhaps I was mistaken about the voice ?

I listened to hear it again. Not long was I kept waiting. Once more it was raised ; not, as before, in words

addressed to the *salteadores* who surrounded me, but to myself.

“Ho, *cavallero*!” cried the robber-chief, coming up to the spot where I stood, and speaking in a tone of triumphant exultation; “you are welcome among us—the more especially as I owe you a *revanche* for the little bit of service you did me last night. If I am not mistaken, it is to your bullet I am indebted for this.”

As the brigand spoke, he threw back upon his shoulders the closed folds of his *manga*, exposing his right arm to my view. I saw that it was carried in a sling, and that the hand, protruding beyond the scarf that supported it, was wrapped in cotton rags, that were stained with blotches of dry blood!

My memory needed no further refreshing. No wonder that the bandit’s voice had fallen upon my ears with a familiar sound. It was the same I had heard only the night before, giving utterance to that hideous threat of which I had hindered the fulfilment—the same that had cried, “Die, Calros Vergara!”

No additional explanation was required. I stood in the presence of Ramon Rayas!

“How feel you now?” continued the robber, in a taunting tone, not unmingled with fierce bitterness. “Don Quixote of the modern time! You, the protector of female innocence! Ha! ha! ha!”

“Ah,” cried he, turning round, and fixing his eyes upon my beautiful horse—held captive, like myself, by half a score of lazos. “*Por Dios*! You have the advantage of La Mancha’s knight in your mount. A steed fit for a *salteador*! He will suit me, as if he had been foaled on purpose.

“Ho there, Santucho!” he cried out to one of his band,

who was holding Moro by the bridle-rein. "Off with that stupid saddle, and replace it with my own. I just wanted such a horse. Thank you, *Señor Americano*! You can have mine in exchange; and you will be the more welcome to him since you have only one more ride to make before making that great leap that will launch you into the gulf of eternity! Ha! ha! ha!"

To this series of taunting speeches I offered no reply. Words of mine would have been idle as the murmurings of the wind. I knew it; and withheld them.

"Into your saddles, *leperos*!" cried the brigand, thus familiarly addressing himself to his subordinates. Bring your prisoner along with you. Strap him tightly to the horse. Have a care he don't escape! If he do you shall dearly rue your negligence, besides losing the pleasure of a spectacle which I shall provide for you after we arrive at the *Rinconada*."

Rayas leaped upon the back of my own brave steed, which chafed, discontented, under the clumsy caparison of the Mexican saddle; but more so when mounted by one whom he seemed to recognize as the enemy of his master.

For myself, I was roughly pitched upon the back of the brigand's horse; and, after being securely tied, hands behind, and legs to the stirrup-leathers, I was conducted from the ground, a brace of brigands riding, one on either side, and guarding me with a vigilance that forbade me to indulge in the slightest hope of escape.

CHAPTER XXI.

ROBBERS EN ROUTE.

At a short distance from the spot where I had been lazoed, the road taken by the robbers debouched from the forest, and entered the *chapparal*.

No longer under the gloomy shadow of the great trees, I had a better view of the band, and could see that they were genuine *salteadores*.

Indeed, I had not doubted it from the first—at least, not after discovering who was their leader. The wounded Jarocho had told me that most of the guerillos commanded by Rayas, were no better than brigands; and that such honest fellows as himself, who had been forced to join it, would all return to their homes, after the breaking up of the Mexican army by the defeat of Cerro Gordo.

What I now saw was no longer Rayas' *guerillas*, but a remnant of it—or rather the individuals of that organization, who had been his bandit associates before the breaking out of the war.

There were in all between twenty and thirty of these patriotic brigands; and from the opportunity I now had of scanning the faces of such as were near me, I can justly affirm that a more ferocious set of ruffians I never beheld—to the full as picturesque, and evidently as pitiless, as their Italian brethren of the Abruzzi.

On their march they observed a sort of rude order—riding two and two—though this formation was forced upon them by the necessity of the narrow path, rather than from any control of their leader.

Where the road at intervals ran through openings, the ranks were broken at will; and the troop would get

clumped together, to string out again on re-entering the chapparal path.

For myself, I was guarded by a brace of morose wretches, as I have said, one riding on each side of me ; and both armed with long naked blades ; which, had I shown the slightest sign of attempting to escape, would have been thrust into me without either reluctance or remorse.

But there was no chance even to make the attempt. I was strapped to the stirrups, with my hands firmly bound behind my back ; and lest the steed, on which they had mounted me, should stray from the track, the lazo of one of my keepers was passed through the bitt-ring of the bridle, and then attached to the tree of the robber's own saddle.

In this manner was our march conducted—the route being towards Orizava. There was no mistaking the direction : for the snow-capped summit of the great “Citlapietel” was right before our faces—piercing up into a sky of cloudless azure.

From the top of a ridge which we crossed, shortly after coming out of the timber, I discovered that we were yet at no great distance from Cerro Gordo itself ; so near, that on glancing back—for we were now riding away from it—I could see the American flag upon “El Telegrafo,” and could even distinguish the stars and stripes !

My chase after the riderless horse had carried me several miles from Corral Falso ; but I had been all the while riding back in the direction of the battle-field—in a line nearly parallel to the main road, over which my troop had been travelling. It was only on re-entering the timber that the chase had conducted me in a different direction—southward, towards Orizava.

I could now understand how I had fallen into the hands of Rayas and his robbers.

After the battle, these worthies had lingered in the neighbourhood of the field—for what purpose I knew not then—plunder, I supposed—and this was, no doubt, the explanation, so far as most of them were concerned. Their chief, however, had a different object ; one which, ere long, I was enabled to comprehend.

The character of the country around Cerro Gordo—a labyrinth of *cañons* and *barrancos*—covered with a thick growth of tangled chapparal, rendered their remaining near the field of their defeat an easy matter—unattended with danger. They knew the pursuit had passed up the main road to Jalapa ; and there was not the remotest chance of their being followed across country.

They had accomplished whatever purpose had kept them near the field ; and they were now *en route* for some more distant scene of action.

I had been actually *riding after them*—on that headlong chase which carried me into the midst of their improvised ambushade !

As a prisoner, my position lay in the rear—only one or two files of the cuadrilla riding behind me.

I could see Rayas in front, at the head of his band.

I wondered he did not hang back for the purpose of taunting me with his triumphant speeches. I could only account for his not doing so, by the supposition that he was a man of patience, and that my hour of torture had not arrived.

That I should have to suffer some fearful indignity, in all likelihood, and the loss of my life, I felt certain. What had occurred between myself and the brigand chief,

had established a relationship that must end in the ruin of one or the other ; and it was clear that I was to be the victim. It needed not that hideous grin with which he had regarded me, on becoming his prisoner—nor the jovial style in which he talked of a *revanche*,—to assure me that for this mild term I might substitute the phrase—“Deadly revenge !”

He had promised his associates a spectacle on their arrival at La Rinconada. I had no doubt, that in that spectacle I was myself to be the prominent figure ; or at all events the chief *sufferer*.

I had been riding for some time, absorbed in meditations, that I need not pronounce painful. Circumstanced as I was, they could not be pleasant. It was only in an occasional and involuntary glance, that my eyes had rested upon Rayas, at the head of his cuadrilla.

I had not noticed a peculiar personage riding by his side. This arose from the fact, that the individual in question was of shorter stature than the other *salteadores*, by nearly the head, and therefore hidden from my view by the bodies of the brigands habitually interposed between us.

After cresting the ridge above mentioned, and commencing the descent on its opposite side, I could command a better view of those in front ; and then it was that the individual, riding alongside of Rayas, attracted my attention. Not only attracted it, but fixed it, to the exclusion of every other thought—even the reflections I had been hitherto indulging in, upon my own unfortunate situation.

At the first glance I had mistaken the companion of the robber chief for a man, or a boy closely approximating to manhood. There was a man's hat upon the head—the usual low-crowned, broad-brimmed *sombrero*. Moreover,

the style of equitation was that of a man—a leg on each side of the saddle.

It was only at the second glance that my gaze became fixed—only after perceiving, by the long plaits of hair hanging down to the croup of the saddle—along with some peculiarities of shape and costume—that the companion of the robber chief was a *woman* !

There was nothing in the discovery to cause me surprise. Both the hat on the head, and the mode—à la *Duchesse de Berri*—in which the woman was mounted, were sights that could be seen any day upon the roads of Mexico, or in the streets of its cities. Both were but the common fashions of the country.

What fixed my attention was the fact, that I fancied I knew the woman—or rather girl, as she appeared to be—that I had seen her before !

It was only the back of the head and shoulders I was yet permitted to see ; but there was sufficient idiosyncrasy about these, to beget within me a vague idea of identification.

I had hardly time to enter into the field of conjecture, when a slight turn in the path brought the faces of the leading riders *en profile* to my view ; among others, that of the girl.

A shot through the heart could not have been more painful, or caused me to start more abruptly, than the sight of that face.

“Lola Vergara !”

CHAPTER XXII.

DARK SUSPICIONS.

I CANNOT describe the painful impression produced upon me, at seeing the Jarocha in such strange companionship.

At first I was inclined to disbelieve the evidence of my eyes, and to think that I was being cheated by a resemblance.

But as the path turned into a second zigzag, more abrupt than the first, the profile became a quarter-face portrait ; and there was no chance for me to avoid the conviction that Lola Vergara was riding alongside Ramon Rayas !

A countenance like hers was not common. It was too beautiful to have had a counterpart, even in that land of lovely graces.

Besides, I now recognized the dress, the same worn by the Jarocha when I had last seen her, some six hours before, with only the addition of the sombrero, which had been donned, no doubt, as a protection against the hot beams of a tropical sun.

I had just time to assure myself of the identity of the girl ; when the road, having reached the bottom of the hill, turned straight again ; and from that time till the cuadrilla came to a halt, I could only catch occasional glimpses, either of the robber captain, or of the fair equestrian moving onward by his side.

Though no longer privileged with a fair view either of Ramon Rayas or Lola Vergara, the painful impression produced by their juxtaposition continued to harass my soul ; and during the half hour that intervened before arriving at the halting-place of the brigands, I gave myself up to

reflections and conjectures imbued with the extreme of bitterness.

My first thought, put in the shape of a mental interrogatory, was, whether the Jarocha was a consenting party to the companionship in which I now saw her?

The position, such as it was, looked more than suspicious. Her dread of Rayas, loudly expressed on the preceding night, might, after all, have been nothing more than hypocrisy; nay, it might have been real, and yet it might have resulted in the association now before my eyes!

I had seen enough of women to convince me, that terror is too often the true weapon by which their affections may be assailed and conquered; and that the possession of absolute power may turn their hate, if not into love, at least into a feeling near akin to it.

I remembered some expressions in reference to Rayas, that, on the night before, had fallen from the lips of Lola Vergara. To me they had been unintelligible at the time, though producing a vague sense of doubt, about the honesty as to her declared antipathy to the man.

These were now recalled, with, as I fancied, a clearer comprehension of their import.

In fine, why should she be there, riding by his side, voluntarily: for there was no appearance of compulsion; but rather of *complaisance*.

No! I should not say that. The glimpse I had had of her face did not give me that idea. On the contrary, I saw, or fancied that I saw a pale cheek, a downcast glance, and a sorrowful expression of countenance.

I was not certain of this; I would have given much to have been assured of it; and my intent gaze was directed to this end, when the straightening of the road, and the interposition of the salteadores, cut short my investigation.

The fancy that she looked sad—in keeping with her name of Dolores—was some consolation ; which enabled me, with a certain tranquillity of mind, to sustain that forced traverse through the chapparal in the companionship of the salteadores.

There was one circumstance that surprised while it pained me as well. Why did Lola not look round ?

During all the time my eyes had been on her, she had not turned hers towards the rear, nor even to one side or the other. This I thought strange, whether her presence among the robbers was forced or voluntary.

Was she aware of the capture which they had made—an officer of the American army ? Or could she be acquainted with the more particular fact, as to who was the individual made prisoner ?

I could not think that she was cognizant of either circumstance ; and yet she had not looked back. If no other feeling, that of natural curiosity, proverbially strong in her sex, would have prompted her to turn her head.

She had not done so. Surely, after what had passed between us on the preceding night, she could not be indifferent to my forlorn condition—scarcely even to the uniform that distinguished me from my captors ?

Such conduct was not compatible with the character of woman, whether Mexican or American. Lola Vergara could not have known of the capture which the robbers had accomplished ; she could not be aware of my presence in the rear of the cuadrilla.

There was consolation in my thinking so, slight as it may be deemed. It would have been a grievous reflection to have believed her to be a sharer in the fortunes of my captors ;—to have known that she was a participator of all that had transpired ;—to imagine that she had even a sus-

picion of who it was who was riding, fast bound to a horse, behind her.

I did not wrong her by the belief. I felt convinced she was unconscious of all—at least of the last circumstance.

I was confirmed in this conviction by something that had occurred, as we parted from the spot where I had been captured. A short halt had been made by the robbers, during which they had been joined by a party that had not been present at their ambuscade. In all likelihood, the Jarocha had been one of this party, and might have been ignorant of what had passed.

This was probable enough; though for myself I had been at the time too much engrossed with my misfortune to take heed to what was transpiring around me.

The explanation satisfied, at the same time that it pleased me. I could give credence to no other. After what had passed on the preceding night—my protection extended to her brother—my sympathy for herself—my profession of something more—her own apparent reciprocation of that something—surely Lola Vergara could not be my enemy?

In all I saw there was a mystery that needed elucidation.

Ere long I obtained it. The cuadrilla came to a halt at a rancheria or collection of huts, all of which appeared to be uninhabited—their owners no doubt having fled at the approach of the robber band.

It was the Rinconada alluded to by the robber chief. In the plazza of the village the order was broken up; and the files in the rear closed in upon the heads of the "column."

By this change of position I was brought close to the side of the Jarocha.

Words can but ill express the pleasure I felt on per-

ceiving that she was strapped to her saddle—like myself, a prisoner; and the scream that escaped her, as she recognized me, was, to my ears, sweeter than any note that ever issued from the lips of Grisi or the “Swedish Nightingale.”

We were not allowed any interchange of words—scarcely even that of a glance. Before I could speak to her, the Jarocha was handed from her horse, and conducted inside one of the *Jacales*—the one which appeared to be the principal “hut” of the *rancheria*.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FIENDISH DESIGN.

I WAS left but little time for reflection; but, short as it was, it enabled me to comprehend the scheme of my captors—or rather that of their chief.

From the Piazza of La Pinconada, Citlapetel was in full view, with its quick acclivity guiding the eye of the observer up to the azure canopy of heaven.

That line of pure virgin snow should have been suggestive of spotless innocence. Alas! to me, at that moment, it was but the suggester of thoughts of a far different character.

On the slope of that majestic mountain, stood the town of Orizava, the capital of the surrounding country. I knew—a knowledge all my own, and not shared by my comrades in the American army—that the lame tyrant of Mexico had fled towards Orizava, and was at that moment safe beyond pursuit in this city of the mountains.

It was not likely I should so soon have forgotten the

contents of that infamous epistle found on the *catre* so lately occupied by the Mexican commander-in-chief, nor the vile conditions therein promised. "*En buen tiempo dormira ella en la tienda, y los brazos de vuestra Excelleza.*" Too truly did I remember them.

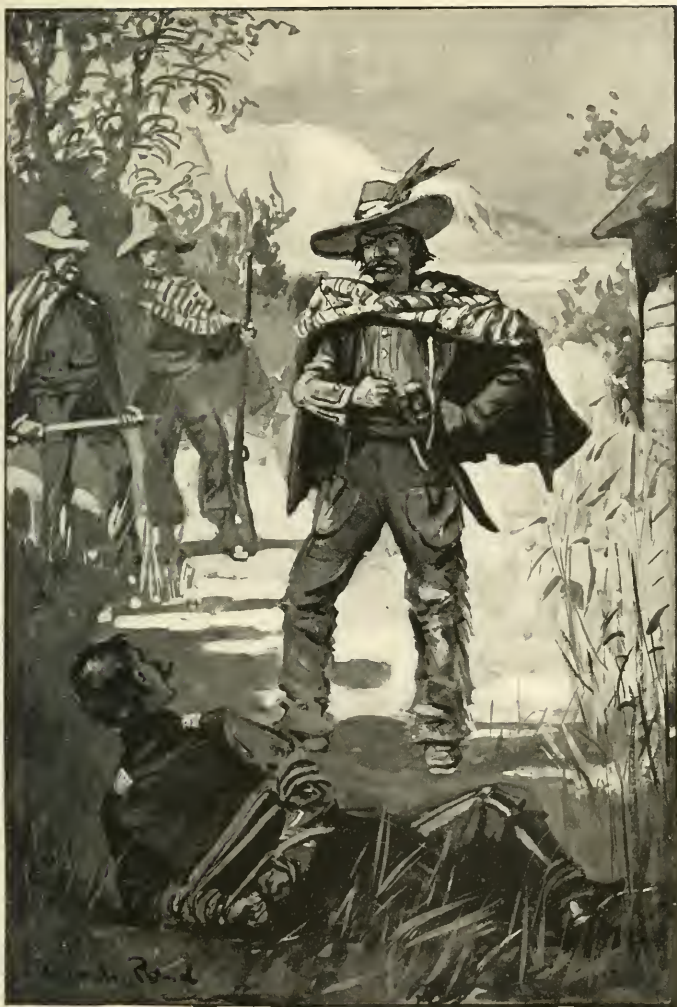
Now, certainly, did I perceive the scheme that the salteador was in the act of executing. Santa Anna should, by that time, be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Orizava, if not in the town itself. Orizava was the destination of Rayas and his robbers!

It needed no further consideration, had there been time for such, either to explain the past or forecast the future. The girl had been taken prisoner on the road between Cerro Gordo and the village of El Plan—captured, perhaps, but a few moments after that parting I had fondly deemed reluctant; ah! perhaps even through the delay caused by myself, and which had separated her from her escort of Jarochos? It might be in the midst of that escort, dismayed and scattered by the onslaught of the salteadores. It might be that the unfortunate Calros—her brother—

My conjectures were cut short. The robber chief stood before me. His air of savage exultation was easily interpreted. He had come to prepare me for the spectacle which he had promised to his companions!

I knew not what was to be its nature; nor do I know to this hour. It was like one of those promised performances of the theatre—conspicuous in the programme, but omitted in the action. It never came to pass.

The brigand directed me to be unbound, and separated from the horse, an order that was instantly executed by his brace of subordinates who had been more especially guarding me.



I LAY, HELPLESS AS A BALE OF MERCHANDISE.

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As soon as my feet were set free from the stirrip-leathers, I was dragged out of the saddle, my limbs were fast lashed together, both at the knees and ankles, and I was rudely cast upon the ground—where I lay, helpless as a bale of merchandize.

During all the time that this action was going forward, the robber chief stood near me, grinning gleefully at my forlorn position, taunting me with my impuissance, and applying to me every ugly epithet to be found in the vocabulary of the Spano-Mexican tongue.

His most favourite allusions were to the “putita” inside the hut, to which he kept pointing, ironically entreating me to protect her; at the same time telling me in plain and most disgusting terms, the fate that was in store for her.

He could not have devised a more excruciating mode of torment. No ill he could have inflicted on my person could have been more painful than this torturing of my soul. I loved the girl whose dishonour was thus freely foreshadowed; and knowing the character of her captor, I could have no doubt about the fulfilment of his atrocious promise.

All the more was I pained, now that I had learnt how involuntary was the Jarocho’s presence among the brutal rabble that surrounded her; all the more, that I fancied in that cry—which escaped her lips on recognizing me as her fellow-prisoner—an accent of interest not to be mistaken.

The look with which she had regarded me was eloquent of the same interest; its muteness only showing the intensity of her sorrowful surprise.

I could not help framing conjectures as to what was to be the spectacle, of which I was to form the conspicuous figure. Its *dénouement* I could only guess—death in some shape or other. Lola’s fate I knew; and my own—all but the mode of its accomplishment. Death in some dire

fashion, by some of those horrid devices so well known to the ruffians who surrounded me, under the sanction of the *lex talionis*, at the time in full practice throughout the land.

Rayas had for the moment left me, and had gone inside the hut, where the Jarocha was kept.

The brace of bandits still stood over me. There was a peculiar grin upon their faces—an expression that bespoke demoniac delight, as if anticipating some scene that combined the comic with the cruel.

I noted a similar expression upon the faces of their comrades, who had gathered in groups in front of the jacale within which their chief had for the moment disappeared.

Not altogether disappeared. Through the interstices between the bamboos which formed the walls, I could see as through the wicker of a cage. Four figures could be counted inside. Three of them were moving about; the fourth was stationary and seated. One of the moving figures was Rayas himself, the other two were a brace of his subordinates, who had conducted, or rather carried, the girl inside. It was her figure I saw in the sitting position, or rather crouched and cowering as in fear.

What did it mean? There was something to come off—something of which the brigands had been already apprised—as I could tell by the infernal glee with which they were congratulating one another.

Evidently some fiendish spectacle was at hand; and it soon became equally evident to me, that it was not I, but my fellow-captive, who was to be its principal figure.

Yes; clear as could be, the girl was destined to some atrocious treatment—some infamous exhibition!

I was painfully pondering in my mind what it was to be—shaping hideous conjectures—when I saw Rayas wave his arm in the direction of the motionless figure.

It seemed a signal to his subordinates ; who, in obedience to it, glided up to the Jarocha, both at the same instant laying hands upon the girl.

She sprang to her feet, and commenced what appeared to be a struggle of resistance. Her cries at the same time came forth freely from the hut, piercing my heart to its very core ; while from the unfeeling wretches outside, they only elicited peals of brutal laughter !

As I could but faintly distinguish the movements of the men inside, I was still uncertain as to the nature of the struggle going on between them and the girl. They appeared to be disrobing her, or rather tearing the clothes from her back !

This was in reality their purpose, effected in a few minutes : for in less time than I have taken to tell it, she was dragged outside the door ; and I saw that the only covering which concealed her person from the lewd eyes that were gazing upon her, was a slight chemise of thin cotton stuff, scarcely reaching to her knees.

At the same instant a sort of truck bedstead, made of bamboos, was brought forth from the hut by another brace of the brigands, who placed it conspicuously in front of where I lay.

Towards this the girl was now conducted.

Merciful heavens ! what could it mean ?

I could only divine the intention by the circumstances that preceded it. These made it too clear for me not to comprehend the dread drama for which the stage was being set.

Rayas himself was to be the perpetrator. I saw him preparing for the grave deed !

I averted my eyes in disgust. I could not look either at the villain or his victim. The sight of the latter might

have melted a heart of stone—any other than that of a brutal brigand. Her cries were of themselves sufficient to fill my heart with the acme of extreme bitterness.

I lay upon my back, gazing upwards to heaven. Was there no help to come from God? Had a thunderbolt from the sky struck me dead at that moment, I should have deemed it mercy. I prayed for death!

The faces of the two men who stood over me were lit up with smiles of fiendish delight. They saw my agony, and began to mock me with ribald words.

They were the last that either of them lived to utter. The one most forward in reviling, suddenly stopped in his speech, as if rebuked by something that had struck him in the face.

A stifled cry escaped from his lips; he tottered a moment on his legs, and then fell heavily by my side!

He had scarcely settled upon the ground before his *confrère*, dropping in like fashion, fell doubled over his body.

There was blood gushing out from the faces of both. I saw that both were corpses!

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SCATTERING OF SALTEADORES.

I WAS less astonished than delighted by a phenomenon that might have appeared mysterious.

But there was no mystery about the matter. The explanation had already reached me in the “crack, crack,” quickly following each other, easily distinguished as the detonation of a brace of rifles, whose reports I had often heard before.

I raised my head, and looked in the direction whence the shots had proceeded. I could see no one; but the cloud of blue smoke fast scattering upon the edge of the chapparal, scarcely twenty paces from the spot, was sufficiently significant. I knew who had created that sulphureous vapour.

A wild cry arose among the terror-stricken brigands, who stood transfixed to the spot, as if uncertain how to act.

It was not until the "crack-crack" had been repeated, and two more of them went sprawling upon the grass, that the whole of the band put themselves fairly in motion, each running towards the horse that stood nearest him.

Their consternation was scarcely greater, when a loud "hurrah" was heard outside the skirts of the *rancheria*; and the heavy hoof-strokes of a troop of cavalry could be distinguished, approaching at full gallop along the road.

Their chief was the only one among the robbers who did not seem to have lost all presence of mind.

Alas! no. It was now displayed with fiendish effect.

On perceiving the surprise, so little expected by him in such a place, he had glided straight towards the Jarocha. Flinging his arms around the girl, he lifted her from the ground, and commenced carrying her towards his horse.

He was not even assisted by his subordinates—for each individual, yielding to the true instinct of *sauve qui peut*, was seeking his own safety.

I saw that Rayas employed both his arms in this effort—having disengaged the wounded one from its sling, before the surprise had taken place. It was only his hand that was wounded, and the arm was still sufficiently sound for his purpose.

Despite the screams and resistance of the Jarocha, he succeeded in placing her on the pommel of his saddle, and in springing behind her into the seat.

In another instant he was going at full gallop, his left hand directing the reins, both arms encircling the semi-nude body of the Jarocha, whose struggles to free herself were still further defeated, by the teeth of her captor fast clutching the long tresses of her hair.

It was a fearful crisis—the most painful I had yet experienced.

The “rangers” were already entering the outskirts of the *rancheria*, on its opposite side—their rifles were repeatedly ringing ; and here and there I could see a fugitive salteador dropping dead from his saddle. But Rayas, with his victim, was still continuing his flight. No one appeared to fire at *him*—for fear of injuring the girl—and this the wretch seemed to know, as he rode exultingly away.

Mounted as he was upon my own noble steed, I knew there would be no chance of any of my comrades overtaking him ; and this it was that was driving me to distraction.

“Fire at the horse !” cried several of the “rangers,” who seemed to be influenced by the thought, “Bring him down, and then——”

There was a moment of silence. I listened for the shots. They came not : the rifles of all had been discharged, and were empty. It was the earnest action of re-loading them that had caused that momentary interval of silence.

Fortunately it was so, else, in recovering my sweetheart, I should have lost the finest steed that ever carried rider. As it was, both were restored to me.

The silence gave me the opportunity I wanted, though only then did the thought occur to me.

With a wrench I raised my body half erect ; and, concentrating all my energies into the effort, I gave utterance to a cry that, if heard, I knew that my steed would understand.

He both heard and understood it : for before its echoes

had ceased to reverberate through the *rancheria*, the horse was seen to wheel suddenly round, and come galloping back!

In vain did Rayas strive to turn him to the track. He only succeeded in checking him, when a struggle commenced—my voice against the spurs of the robber.

During the strife Rayas found full occupation in the management of Moro, without thinking of the Jarocho. Even his teeth became disengaged from the plaits of her hair; and, seeing a chance for safety, the young girl made a desperate effort, and succeeded in getting clear of that unwelcome embrace.

In another instant she had reached the ground, and was seen running back towards the *rancheria*.

The robber cast a glance after her, that spoke unutterable disappointment; but seeing that his own liberty was in danger, and despairing of a conquest over the horse, he dropped the reins, sprang out of the saddle, and shot like an arrow into the chapparal—at that place an almost impervious thicket.

Several shots were fired after him, and the thicket was entered in search; but strange to say, no traces of the fugitive could be found.

In all likelihood he had made his escape by capturing some of the horses of his comrades—several of which were at the time straying riderless through the chapparal.

The rescue needed but slight explanation. On perceiving that I had failed to return in due time to the halting-place at Corral Falso, my men mounted their horses and rode forth in search of me. Guided by the two trappers, Rube and Garey, they had no difficulty in following my trail.

On entering the forest-road, the numerous hoof-prints of the robbers' horses had filled them with fears for my safety; and having reached the place where I had been "lazoed," the experienced trappers easily interpreted the "sign."

From that point they had ridden at an increased rate of speed ; and as the robbers had no suspicion of being pursued, their slow march, with the halt that succeeded it, had favoured the rangers in overtaking them.

Rube and Garey, acting as scouts, had kept in the advance.

On coming within sight of the *rancheria*, they had left their horses behind, and had crept forward under cover of the thicket.

It was the double detonation of their rifles that had first given the surprise to the *salteadores*—at the same time, as had been preconcerted, it acted as a signal to the rangers to charge forward into the place.

The Jarocha's presence among the bandits has been already explained. My conjecture was correct. On the way between Cerro Gordo and the village of Rio del Plan, she had lingered behind the *cortège* that accompanied her wounded brother. At a turn on the road, some half-dozen of the ruffians of Rayas' band had rushed out of an ambuscade and seized hold of her. By stifling her cries, they had succeeded in conveying her off, even without alarming the escort of Jarochos.

All this chapter of strange incidents occurred within the short space of twenty-four hours : for before a second sun had set, I was once more at the head of my troop, *en route* for Jalapa ; while the beautiful Jarocha, with her honour 'till intact, but her heart, as I hoped, sweetly affected towards her preserver, was on her way, this time with a safer escort, to her native *rancheria*.

We did not part without a mutual promise to meet again. Need I say, that the promise was kept.

DESPARD, THE SPORTSMAN.

CHAPTER I.

A CITY OF DUELLISTS.

AMONG the cities of America, New Orleans enjoys a special reputation. The important position it holds as the key to the great valley of the Mississippi, of whose commerce it is the natural *entrepôt* as well as *décharge*—its late rapid growth and aggrandizement—all combine to render the “Crescent City” one of the most interesting places in the world, and by far the most interesting in the United States.

A variety of other circumstances have contributed to invest New Orleans with a peculiar character in the eyes of the American people. The romantic history of its early settlement—the sub-tropical stamp of its vegetation, and the truly tropical character of its climate—the repeated changing of its early owners; the influx and commingling of the most varied and opposite nationalities; and the *bizarrerie* of manners and customs resulting therefrom, could not otherwise than produce a community of a peculiar kind.

And such has been the result. Go where you will throughout the Atlantic states, or even through the states

of the West, you will find a certain sentiment of interest attached to the name of the "Crescent City;" and no one talks of it with indifference. The young Kentuckian, who has not yet been "down the river," looks forward with pleasant anticipation to the hour, when he may indulge in a visit to that place of infinite luxury and pleasure—the Mecca of the Western world.

The growth of New Orleans has been rapid, almost beyond parallel—that is, dating from the day it became a republican city. Up to that time its history is scarcely worth recording.

Sixty years have witnessed its increase from a village of 10,000—of little trade and less importance—to a grand commercial city, numbering a population of 200,000 souls. And this in the teeth of a pestilential epidemic, that annually robs it of its thousands of inhabitants.

But for the drawback of climate, New Orleans would, ere this, have rivalled New York; but it looks forward to a still grander future. Its people believe it destined to become the metropolis of the world; and in view of its peculiar position, there is no great presumption in the prophecy.

New Orleans is not looked upon as a provincial city—it never was one. It is a true metropolis, and ever has been, from the time when it was the head-quarters and commercial depôt of the gulf pirates, to the present hour.

Its manners and customs are its own; its fashions are original, or, if borrowed, it is from the Boulevards, not from Broadway. The latest *coiffure* of a Parisian belle, the cut of a coat, or the shape of a hat, will make its appearance upon the streets of New Orleans, earlier than on those of New York—notwithstanding the advantage which the latter has in Atlantic steamers: and, what is more, the

coat and hat of the New Orleansois will be of better fabric, and costlier materials, than that of the New Yorker. The Creole cares little for expense: he clothes himself in the best—the finest linen that loom can produce; the finest cloth that can be fabricated. Hats are worn costing twenty-five dollars apiece; and the bills of a tailor of the Rue Royale would astonish even a customer of Stultz. I have myself some recollection of a twelve guinea coat, made me by one of these Transatlantic artists; but I remember also that *it was a coat*.

New Orleans, then, may fairly claim to be considered a metropolis; and, among its many titles there is one which it enjoys *par excellence*, that is, in being the head-quarters of the *duello*. In no other part of America, nor haply in the world either, are there so many personal encounters—nowhere is the sword so often drawn, or the pistol aimed, in single combat, as among the fiery spirits of the “Crescent City.” Scarcely a week passes without an “affair;” and too often, through the sombre forest of Pontchartrain, borne upon the still morning air, may be heard the quick responsive detonations that betoken a hostile meeting—perhaps the last moments of some noble but misguided youth.

I have said that nearly every week witnesses such a scene—I am writing of the present. Were I to speak of the past, I should have to make a slight alteration in my phraseology. Were I to use the phrase, “nearly every day,” it would not invalidate the truth of my assertion; and that of a period not yet twenty years gone by.

At that time a duel, or a street fight—one or the other—was a diurnal occurrence: and the notoriety of either ended almost with the hour in which it came off.

It was difficult for a man of spirit to keep his hand clear of these embroglios; and even elderly respectable

men—men, married and with grown-up families—were not exempted from duelling, but were expected to turn out and fight, if but the slightest insult were offered them.

Of course a stranger, ignorant of the customs of the place, and used to a society where a little liberal “larking” was allowed, would there soon be cured of his propensity for practical jokes.

But even a sober-minded individual could not always steer himself so as to escape an adventure. For myself, without being at all of a pugnacious disposition, I came very nigh tumbling into an “affair” within twenty-four hours after my first landing in New Orleans ; and a friend, who was my companion, actually *did* take the field.

The circumstance is scarcely worth relating—and, perhaps, it would be better, both for my friend and myself, if it were left untold.

But there is a dramatic necessity in the revelation. The incident introduced me to the principal characters of the little drama I have essayed to set forth ; and the circumstances of this introduction—odd though they were—are required to elucidate the “situation.”

I love the sea, but hate sea-travelling. I never “go down to it in ships” but with great reluctance, and from sheer necessity. My fellow-voyager felt exactly as I did—both of us were alike weary of the sea. What was our joy, then, when, after a voyage ranging nearly from pole to equator—after being “cabined, cribbed, and confined” for a period of three months—buffeted by billows, and broiled amid long-continued calms—we beheld the promised land around the mouths of the mighty Mississippi !

The dove that escaped from the Ark was not more eager to set its claws upon a branch, than we to plant our feet upon *terra firma*.

The treeless waste did not terrify us. Swamp as it was, and is, we should have preferred landing in its midst to staying longer aboard, had a boat been at our service.

As there was none, we were compelled to endure the tedious up-stream navigation of one hundred miles, before our eyes finally rested upon the shining cupola of the St. Charles.

Then we could endure the ship no longer ; and our importunities having produced their effects upon the kindly old skipper, two stout tars were ordered into the gig, and myself and companion were rapidly "shot" upon the bank.

It is not easy to describe the pleasurable sensations one has at such a moment ; but if you can fancy how a bird might feel on escaping from its cage, you may have a very good idea of how we felt on getting clear of our ship.

We were still several miles below New Orleans ; but a wide road wended in the direction of the city, running along the crest of a great embankment, known as the "Levee," and taking this road for our guide, we started forward towards the town.

CHAPTER II.

SCENE IN A DRINKING SALOON.

WE passed plantations of sugar-cane, and admired the houses in which their owners dwelt—handsome villas, embowered amid orange groves, and shaded with Persian lilacs and magnolias.

We might have entertained the desire to enter one or other of these luxuriant retreats · but, under the circum-

stances, there was neither hope nor prospect, and we continued on.

As we advanced up the road, other houses were encountered—some of a less inhospitable character. These were *cabarets* and *cafés*, that, with their coloured bottles and sparkling glasses, their open fronts and cool shaded corridors, were too tempting to be passed.

There was a sweetness about these novel potations of “claret sangarees” and “juleps,” fragrant with the smell of mint and pines—an attractive aroma—that could not be repelled, especially by one escaping from the stench of raw rum and ship’s bilge water.

Neither my companion nor I had the strength to resist their seductive influence ; and, giving way to it, we called at more than one *cabaret*, and tasted of more than one strange mixture. In fine, we became merry.

The sun was already low when we landed ; and before we had entered the suburbs of the city, his disc had disappeared behind the dark belt of cypress forest that bounds the western horizon.

The street lamps were alight, glimmering but dimly, and at long intervals from each other ; but a little afterwards a light glistened in our eyes more brilliant and attractive.

Through a large open folding-door was disclosed the interior of one of those magnificent drinking “saloons,” for which the “Crescent City” is so celebrated. The sheen of a thousand sparkling objects—of glasses, bottles, and mirrors ranged around the walls—produced an effect gorgeous and dazzling. To our eyes it appeared the interior of an enchanted palace—a cave of Aladdin.

We were just in the mood to explore it ; and, without further ado, we stepped across the threshold ; and approach-

ing the "bar," over a snow-white sanded floor, we demanded a brace of fresh juleps.

What followed I do not pretend to detail, with any degree of exactness. I have a confused remembrance of drinking in the midst of a crowd of men—most of them bearded, and of foreign aspect. The language was that of Babel, in which French predominated; and the varied costumes betokened a miscellaneous convention of different trades and professions. Numbers of them had the "cut" and air of sea-faring men—skippers of merchant vessels—while others were landsmen, traders, or small planters; and not a few were richly and fashionably dressed as gentlemen—real or counterfeit, I could not tell which.

My companion—a jolly young Hibernian—like myself, just escaped from the cloisters of *Alma Mater*, soon got *en rapport* with these strangers. Hospitable fellows they appeared; and in the twinkling of an eye we were drinking and clinking glasses, as if we had fallen among a batch of old friends or playmates!

There was one individual who attracted my notice. This may have arisen partly from the fact that he was more assiduous in his attentions to us than any of the rest; but there was also something distinctive in the style of the man.

He was a young man, apparently about twenty years of age, but with all the *ton* and air of a person of thirty—a precocity to be attributed partly to clime, and partly to the habitudes of New Orleans life. He was of medium size; with regular features, well and sharply outlined; his complexion was brunette, with an olive tinge; and his hair black, luxuriant, and wavy. His moustaches were dark and well defined, slightly curling at the tips. He was handsome, until you met the glance of his eye. In that there

was something repellent ; though why, it would be difficult to say. The expression was cold and animal. A slight scar along the prominence of his cheek was noticeable ; and might have been received in an encounter with rapiers, or from the blade of a knife.

This young man was elegantly attired. His dress consisted of a claret-coloured dress-coat, of finest cloth, with gilt buttons, and satin-lined skirts—a vest of spotless *Marseilles*—black inexpressibles—white linen *bootees*—and a Paris hat. A shirt ruffled with finest cambric, both at the bosom and sleeves, completed his costume.

To-day, and in the streets of London, this would appear the costume of a snob. Not so there and then. The dress described, with slight variations as to cut and colour, was the usual morning habit of a New Orleans gentleman—that is, his winter habit. In summer, white linen, or “nankeen” upon his body, and the costly “Panama” on his head.

I have been particular in describing this young fellow, as I afterwards ascertained that he was the type of a class which at that time abounded in New Orleans—most of them of French or Spanish origin—the descendants of the ruined planters of Haiti ; or a later importation—the sons of the refugees whom revolution had expelled from Mexico and South America.

Of these the “Crescent City” contained a legion—most of them being without visible means—too lazy to work, too proud to beg—dashing adventurers, who, in elegant attire, appeared around the tables of “Craps” and “Kino ;” in the grand hotels and exchanges ; at the public balls ; and not unfrequently in the best private company—for, at this time, the “society” of the “Crescent City” was far from being scrupulous or exacting. So

long as a gentleman's cloth and cambric were *en regle*, no one speculated as to whether his tailor was contented, or his *blanchisseuse* had given him a discharge for her little account.

The New Orleanois pride themselves on minding their own affairs; and indeed there is some justice in their claim. Moreover, the rôle of the meddler is not without danger among these people; and even the half-proscribed adventurers of whom I have spoken, though not disdaining to live by *cards*, were ever ready to exchange one with the man who would cast the slightest slur upon their respectability.

Of just such a "kidney" was the individual we had met; though, of course, at that first interview, I was not aware of it. I was then little skilled in reading character from the physiognomy, and yet I remember that the glance of this young fellow, notwithstanding his polite attentions, produced an unpleasant impression upon me; and some instinct whispered to me that, despite his elegant attire and fine bearing, our new acquaintance *was not exactly a gentleman*.

My companion seemed more pleased with him than I was. I confess, however, that he had drunk deeper, and was far less capable of forming a judgment. As I turned away to converse with another of the strangers, I noticed the two—the Hibernian and the Frenchman—standing close together, champagne glasses in hand, and *hobnobbing* in the most fraternal manner.

Ten minutes might have elapsed before I faced round again. When I did so, it was in consequence of some loud words that were uttered behind me, and in which I recognized the voice of my friend, speaking in an angry and excited tone. The words were:—

"Yes, sir ! it's gone—and, by Jaysus, *you* took it !"

"Pardon, Monsieur !"

"Pardon, indeed !—you've got my watch—you've *stolen it*, sir !"

Almost simultaneously with this unexpected accusation, I heard a loud, fierce "*sacr-r-ré*" from the Frenchman, followed instantly by a sharp metallic click, as of a pistol being cocked ; and as soon as I could get my eyes fairly upon the disputing parties, I beheld a somewhat frightful *tableau*.

My friend was standing close to the bar, pointing with one hand to the broken guard of his watch, which dangled loosely over the lappels of his waistcoat. His face was towards me, and from his gestures, as well as from the words he had uttered, I could see that some one had made free with his chronometer, and that he believed the thief to be the *elegant* already described.

The latter was between me and the Hibernian, and, as he stood facing his accuser, I could as yet see only his back.

But the suspicious "click" I had heard, caused me to step hastily to one side ; and this brought me in sight of the ugly weapon poised in the fellow's hand, with its muzzle pointed directly at the head of my fellow-voyager, who, seemingly taken by surprise, was making no effort to get out of the way !

All this had passed within a second of time.

Impelled by a sort of instinct, I sprang forward and clutched the pistol around the lock.

Whether I saved the life of my friend by so doing, I cannot say ; but the shot was not delivered ; and in the subsequent struggle between myself and the stranger, for possession of the pistol, the cap was wrenched off, and the weapon remained in my hands.

Seeing it was harmless, I returned it to its owner, with a word of caution to him not to be so ready in drawing such dangerous weapons in the middle of a crowd.

"*Sacré !*" shouted he, addressing himself more particularly to my fellow-voyager ; "you shall repent this insult —*sacr-r-ré !*"

"Insult, indeed !" stammered out the Hibernian—whom, as he would not desire his real name to be known, I shall call Casey. "I repeat it, then, my fine fellow ! My watch is gone—it was taken from my fob here : you see *this*, gentlemen ?" and Casey exhibited to the crowd the wrenched swivel. "It was he who did it : I repeat that he is the thief !"

The Frenchman fairly foamed with rage at this fresh accusation ; while, by his gestures, he appeared as if desirous of recapping the pistol.

I watched him closely, however, to prevent such a movement, as I knew that Casey was in no condition to defend himself.

At the same time I endeavoured, along with several others, to bring the affair to an explanation, and, if possible, to a pacific termination.

CHAPTER III.

A GENERAL SEARCH ALL ROUND.

My first belief was that Casey was labouring under an erroneous impression. That some one had robbed him of his watch was clear enough ; but there were several persons around him—some of them far more suspicious-looking characters than the accused.

Moreover, the elegant style of the man, and the indignant warmth he had displayed, seemed, to some extent, to attest his innocence.

My belief, then, was that Casey had pitched upon the wrong man; and I appealed to him to withdraw the charge, and acknowledge his error.

To my surprise he would do neither the one nor the other; and, notwithstanding the half-maudlin state he was in, there was an earnestness in his manner, and an unwavering pertinacity in his accusation, that led me to think he was not acting upon mere suspicion, but had *seen something*.

The noise and confusion, however, for the time prevented any explanation from being heard upon either side.

A voice arose above the din, calling out for the doors to be closed.

This was followed by a proposal that every one present should submit to be searched.

"Let there be a general search all round!" demanded several voices.

I recognized the man who was foremost in this demand—it was the mate of our own ship, who had dropped in along with several old sea-wolves like himself—for the vessel had been warped up, and was now lying at an adjacent wharf.

"Yes," responded several voices; "a search, a search! let us see who is the thief!"

No one objected—no one could—for each person present had a personal interest in the result; and, as no one was likely now to go out, the shutting of the doors was ruled as unnecessary.

Two men were immediately chosen as "searchers"—one of whom was our mate himself—the other the keeper of

the saloon ; and, without loss of time, the search proceeded.

It was altogether an odd spectacle, to see the two inquirers pass from individual to individual—stopping before each one in turn, handling him about the breast and back, and stripping him down the arms, legs, and thighs, as if they were a brace of electro-biologists, putting the whole company into a mesmeric slumber.

There was a good deal of merriment, and now and then loud bursts of laughter, as some character well known to the company interrupted the silence with a *jeu d' esprit*. For all this, there was a certain solemnity about the proceeding—a sort of painful anticipation that some one would prove the criminal.

During all this time the accused maintained a moody silence—addressing only a short phrase or two to some of his own friends, who had clustered around him. His look betokened confidence ; and but for a side-whisper which I had heard from Casey, I should certainly have continued under the impression that the gentleman was innocent. This whisper, however, staggered my faith : for it was a simple and earnest declaration that he, Casey, had seen the watch in the fellow's hand.

“Surely you must be mistaken—it might have been some other hand ?”

“Not a bit of it !—I noticed the ruffles as the watch disappeared under them.”

“Remember, Casey, you're not very clear-sighted at this moment : think what you've been taking——”

“Bah ! I'm not blind for all that ; and I tell you, the loss of my twenty guinea repeater has made me as sober as a judge, my boy. I hope, however, it is not gone yet—we'll soon see.”

"You'll never see your watch again," said I. "The fellow hasn't got it—I can tell by his looks."

My conjecture proved correct. The young Frenchman was searched in common with the others. He made no objection—he could make none—and, to do the old sea-wolf justice, he performed his duty with elaborate exactness. He was no lover of Creole dandyism ; and I verily believe he would have chuckled with delight, to have found the stolen property on the person of the exquisite.

It was not so to be, however : the watch was not there, and the Frenchman smiled triumphantly at the termination of the search.

Others were now examined, until all had had their turn. No watch !

All present were declared innocent men—the watch was not in the room !

This result had been prophesied long before, and I expected it myself. It was easily explained. Beyond doubt Casey had lost his watch, by a thief, and inside the saloon ; but several persons had been observed to go out about the time he discovered his loss, or rather at the moment when he declared the accusation. One of these must have been the thief—that was the verdict of the company. More likely one of them had been the *receiver*.

Casey was a little crest-fallen, and the regards of the company were not favourable to him. This, however, only referred to the Creoles and Frenchmen. The honest seafaring fellows rather sympathized with him. They saw he had sustained a loss ; and they were well enough acquainted with New Orleans life, to know that the man who did the deed was probably still in the room.

Casey obstinately clung to his original statement ; but of course no longer urged it publicly—only *sotto voce* to our

mate, and one or two others, who, with myself, were counselling him to apologize.

Our whispering conversation was interrupted by the approach of the young Frenchman. There was a certain resolve in his look, that bespoke some determination—evidently the affair was not over.

As he drew near, way was made for him, and he stood confronting Casey.

“Now, Monsieur, do you apologize?”

Several cried “Yes,” by way of urging Casey to an affirmative.

“No,” said he, firmly and emphatically—“never! I stand to what I said. You took my watch—you *stole* it.”

“Liar!” cried the once more infuriated Frenchman, and both at the same instant sprang towards each other.

Fortunately, neither was armed—except with the weapons which nature had provided—and a short game of “fisticuffs”—in which Casey had decidedly the advantage—served as a ‘scape valve for the ebullition of their anger.

I might have dreaded the re-drawing of the pistol ; but, during the whole interval, the mate and I, to whom I had given a hint, had kept our eyes upon the owner of it, and hindered him from rendering it available.

The combatants were soon separated ; and after that commenced the more formal ceremony of the exchange of “cards.”

Casey gave his address, “St. Charles Hotel”—whither we were bound, and towards which we had been steering when “brought to” by the gleaming lights of the *café*.

The Frenchman’s card was taken in return ; and, after a parting glass with the honest mate, and his two or three

confrères, we sallied forth from the saloon ; traversed the long narrow streets of the First Municipality, and a little before midnight we arrived at that magnificent *caravanseraï* known as the St. Charles Hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXCHANGE OF CARDS.

M. JACQUES DESPARD, 9, <i>Rue Dauphin</i> .
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SUCH was the little memento that met my eyes as I entered Casey's sleeping apartment, at an early hour in the morning. It lay upon his dressing-table—a sorry substitute for the “twenty guinea repeater” that should have been found there.

My friend was still in the land of dreams. I was loth to awake him to the unpleasant reality which that tiny piece of pasteboard would naturally suggest ; for, besides being in itself a symbol of grave import, it would be certain to recall to poor Casey the remembrance of his loss, to whom, being no Cræsus, it was a serious one.

In reality he so regarded it ; and, when awakened at length, and conscious of what had transpired on the preceding night, he expressed far more concern about the loss he had sustained, than about the expected encounter. The latter he treated as a ridiculous joke—laughing at it as he pitched the card upon the floor.

“Stay !” said he, picking it up, and carefully placing it

in his pocket-book. "It *might* be the fellow's real name and address. If so, it will enable me to find him again ; and, by Jaysus, I'll have that watch, or take the worth of it out of his hide. Hang it, man !—it's a family piece—got our crest on it—has been in the family ever since repeaters came into fashion. Yes, I'll take the worth of it out of his hide ! But that's not possible—the whole of his yellow skin isn't worth that watch !"

And so talked Casey, while he performed his toilet as coolly as if he were dressing for a dinner party, instead of preparing himself for what might prove a deadly encounter.

Pistols we had decided it should be. Casey, expecting to be the challenged party, would, of course, be entitled to the choice of weapons. Had it been otherwise, my friend would have been in a bit of a dilemma ; for, as he assured me, he had never taken a fencing lesson in his life ; and it is notorious that the Creoles of New Orleans are skilled in the use of the small-sword. Some friendly strangers, after the exchange of cards on the preceding night, had made us aware of this fact, at the same time warning us that Casey's intended antagonist, whom they knew, was a noted swordsman. Swords, then, were not to be thought of.

Of course, as the party to be challenged, our duty was to stay at home (at the Hotel) until we should hear from the challenger. For my part, I did not anticipate there would be much delay ; and I gave orders for a hurried breakfast.

"Faith ! you may take your time about it," said Casey to the retiring waiter. "There's no need to spoil the meal. Never fear—we'll eat our breakfast without being interrupted."

"Nonsense! the friend of M. Despard will be here in ten minutes."

"No—nor in ten hours nayther. You'll ate your dinner without seeing either Mither Despard or his friend."

"Why do you think so?"

"Bah!—Is it a thief send a challenge to a gentleman? All blarney and brag! I tell you the fellow's a thief—he has got my watch, bad luck to him!—and he thinks the givin' of the card a ready way to get out of the scrape: that's the maning of it. We'll never set eyes on him again, barrin' we go after him."

I was at first disposed to ridicule this logic; but, as time passed, I began to think there was some truth in it. We waited for breakfast being prepared, and then ate it in the most leisurely manner. As Casey had predicted, no one interrupted us at the meal; no visitor was announced—no card came in. I had already given rigorous orders to the clerk of the Hotel to forward any application on the instant.

The hour of ten arrived, but no communication from "M. Jacques Despard."

"Perhaps he is hunting up a friend?" I suggested. "We must give him time."

Eleven o'clock.

"Let's have a sherry cobbler!" proposed Casey; "we'll have plenty of time to drink it."

A couple of those magnificent "sherry cobbles," for which the St. Charles is world renowned, were immediately ordered up; and we passed the better half of an hour with the straw between our lips.

Twelve o'clock. Still no Despard—no friend—no challenge!

"I told you so," said Casey, not triumphantly, but rather

in a tone of despondence. "This card's good for nothing," he continued, taking the piece of pasteboard from his pocket, and holding it up before his eyes; "a regular sham, I suspect, like the fellow himself—a false name and address—you see it's in pencil? Ah, mother o' Moses! I'll never see that watch again! Sure enough," continued he, after a pause, "the name's in print—he's gone to the expense of having that engraved, or somebody has for him, which is more likely.—No!—he won't come to time."

"We must remain at home till dinner. Perhaps they keep late hours here."

"Late or early, we won't see Misther Despard till we go after him; an' by gorra!" cried Casey, striking the table in a most violent manner, "that's what I mane to do. A man don't point a pistol at my head, without giving me a chance to return the compliment; and I'm bound to have another try for that watch."

From Casey's earnest speech and manner, I saw that he was resolved; and I knew enough of him to be aware that he was a man of strong resolution. Whether a challenge came or not, he was determined that the affair should not drop, till he had some kind of revenge upon Jacques Despard, or, if no such person existed, upon the "swell" who had stolen his repeater.

It certainly appeared as if the card *was* a sham: for the dinner hour came, and no one had acknowledged it.

We descended, and ate our dinner at the general *table d'hôte*—such a dinner as can be obtained only in the luxurious hostelry of the St. Charles.

We sat over our wine till eight o'clock; but although a few friends joined us at the table, we heard nothing of a hostile visitor. Under the influence of *Sillery* and *Moët*,

we for the time forgot the unpleasant incidents of the preceding night.

For my part, I should have been glad to have forgotten them altogether, or at all events to have left the matter where it stood ; and such was the tenor of my counsels. But it proved of no avail : the fiery Hibernian was determined, as he expressed it, to have his "whack" out : he would either get back his watch or have a "pop" at the thief who stole it.

So resolved was he on carrying out his intention, that I saw it was idle to oppose him.

Certainly it was rather a singular affair ; and now that a whole day had passed without any communication from M. Despard, I became more than half convinced that Casey was right, and that the exquisite really had committed the theft. It was his indignant repudiation of the charge that had misled me ; but Casey's constant and earnest asseveration—now strengthened by the after circumstances of the false card, and the failure to make an appearance—satisfied me that we had been in the company of a sharper.

With this conviction I retired for the night, Casey warning me that he should be with me at an early hour in the morning, in order to devise what measures should be taken.

With regard to an early hour, he was too true to his promise. Before six—long before I felt inclined to leave my comfortable bed—he was with me.

He apologized for disturbing me so early, on the score of his being without a watch, and could not tell the time ; but I could perceive that the jest was a melancholy one.

"What do you mean to do?"

"Why, to find Master Ruffles shirt, to be sure."

“ Will you not give him an hour’s grace? Perhaps he may send this morning? ”

“ No chance whatever.”

“ It is possible he may have lost your card? Leave it alone till we have had breakfast.”

“ Lost my card? No. Besides, he might easily have got over that difficulty. He knew we were on our way to this hotel. Don’t all the world come here? No; that isn’t the fellow’s excuse, and I shan’t eat till I know what is. So, rouse up, my boy! and come along.”

“ But where are you going? ”

“ Number noine, Rue Daw—daw—hang his scribble! Daw—phin, I believe.”

I arose, and dressed myself with as little delay as possible.

Whilst making my toilette, Casey gave me a hurried sketch of how he intended to proceed. It amounted to little more than a declaration of his intention to make M. Jacques Despard disgorge the stolen property, or fight. In other words, Casey, believing himself to be in a lawless land (and his experience to some extent seemed to justify the belief), had determined upon taking the law into his own hands.

I saw that he no longer contemplated a duel with his light-fingered adversary. On the contrary, he talked only of “pitching into the fellow,” and “taking the worth of his watch out of him.” The angry feeling he exhibited convinced me that he meant what he said; and that the moment he should set eyes on the Frenchman, there would be a “row.”

I saw that this would not do on any account, and for various reasons. M. Jacques Despard, if found at all, would, no doubt, be found to have a fresh cap on the

nipple of his pistol ; and to be present at a street fight, either as principal or backer, was not to my liking. I had no ambition, either of catching a stray bullet, or of being locked up in the New Orleans Calaboose ; and by yielding to Casey's wish I should be booked for one or the other.

Before completing my toilet, therefore, it occurred to me to suggest a slight change in Casey's programme—which was to the effect that he should stay where he was, and leave it to me to call at the address upon the card. If it should prove that M. Despard lived there, there would be no difficulty in finding him whenever we should want him. If the contrary, my going alone would be no great waste of time ; and we could afterwards adopt such measures as were necessary to bring him to terms.

This advice appeared reasonable, and Casey consented to follow it, charging me, as I left him, with the emphatic message—

“ Tell the fellow if he don't challenge *me*, I'll challenge *him*, by G—d ! ”

In five minutes afterwards, I was on my way with the card between my fingers, and walking rapidly towards the Rue Dauphin.

CHAPTER V.

M. LUIS DE HAUTEROCHE.

FOLLOWING the directions, which I had taken from the hotel-porter, I kept down St. Charles Street, and crossing the Canal, I entered the Rue Royale into the French *quarter* or “ municipality.”

I was informed that by keeping along the Rue Royale

for a half mile or so, I should find the Rue Dauphin leading out of it; and I had, therefore, nothing more to do than to walk directly onward, and look out for the names upon the corners of the streets.

Though it was day-light, the lamps were still faintly glimmering, their nightly allowance of oil not being quite exhausted. The shops and warehouses were yet closed; though here and there might be seen a cabaret or café, that had opened its trap-like doors to catch the early birds—small traders on their way to the great vegetable market—cotton-rollers in sky-blue linen inexpressibles, with their shining steel hooks laid jauntily along their hips; now and then a citizen—clerk or shopkeeper—hurrying along to his place of business. Only those of very early habits were abroad.

I had proceeded down the Rue Royale about a quarter of a mile, and was beginning to look out for the lettering on the corners of the cross streets, when my attention was drawn to an individual coming in the opposite direction. Though he was still at a considerable distance, and we were on different sides of the street, I fancied I recognized him. Each moment brought us nearer to one another; and as I had kept my eyes upon him from the first, I at length became satisfied of the identity of M. Jacques Despard.

“A fortunate encounter,” thought I. “It will save me the trouble of searching for No. 9, Rue Dauphin.”

The dress was different: it was a blue coat instead of a claret, and the ruffles were less conspicuously displayed; but the size, shape, and countenance were the same—as also the hair, moustache, and complexion. It must be my man.

Crossing diagonally, I placed myself on the banquette to

await the gentleman's approach. My position would have hindered him from passing; and the next moment he halted, and we stood face to face.

"*Bon jour, Monsieur !*" I began.

He made no answer, but stood with his eyes staring widely upon me, in which the expression was simply that of innocent surprise.

"Well counterfeited," thought I.

"You are early abroad," I continued. "May I ask, Monsieur, what business has brought him into the streets at such an hour of the morning?"

The thought had struck me that he might be on his way to the St. Charles, to make some inquiry; and I recalled my conjecture about his having mislaid Casey's card.

"What business, Monsieur, but that of my profession?" and as he made this reply, his dark eye flashed with a kindling indignation—which, of course, I regarded as counterfeit.

"Oh!" said I, in a sneering tone, "it appears that you pursue your profession at all hours. I thought the night was your favourite time. I should have fancied that at this hour you would scarcely have found victims."

"Fool! Who are you? What are you talking of? What means this rudeness?"

"Pooh—pooh! Monsieur Despard; you are not going to get off in that way. Your memory appears short. Perhaps this card will refresh it; or do you repudiate that also?"

"Card!—what card?"

"Look there!—perhaps you will deny having given it?"

"I know nothing of it, Monsieur; but you shall have *my card*; and for this insult I demand yours in return."

"It seems idle to make the exchange, after what has already passed."

Curiosity, however, prompted me. I was desirous of ascertaining whether his first address had been a false one, as Casey had suggested. Hastily scratching the address of the hotel, I handed him my card, taking his in return. To my astonishment I read :—

*"Luis De Hauteroche,
"16, Rue Royale."*

I should have been puzzled, but the solution was evident. The fellow was no doubt well provided with cards—kept a varied "pack" of them, and this was only another sham one.

I was determined, however, that I should not lose sight of him till I had fairly "treed" him.

"Is this your *real* address?" I inquired, with an incredulous expression.

"*Peste! Monsieur*, do you still continue your insults? But you shall give me full satisfaction. It is my professional address. See for yourself."

And as he said this he pointed to the door of a house, only a few yards from the spot where we were standing.

Among other names painted upon the panel I read :

*"M. Luis De Hauteroche,
"Avocat."*

"I can be found here at all hours," said he, passing me and stepping inside the doorway. "But you will not need to seek me, Monsieur. I promise it, my friend shall call upon you without delay."

The door closing behind him put an end to our "interview."

For some seconds I stood in a kind of "quandary." I could not doubt but that it was the same man whom we had met in the drinking saloon. The dress was different—of a more sober cut, though equally elegant—but this was nothing : it was a different hour, and that might account for the change of garments. The *tout ensemble* was the same—the features, complexion, colour of hair, curl and all.

And still I could not exactly identify the bearing of M. Jacques Despard with that of M. Luis De Hauteroche. The evil expression of eye which I had noticed formerly was not visible to-day ; and certainly the behaviour of the young man on the present occasion, had been that of an innocent and insulted gentleman.

Was it possible I could have made a mistake, and had, in transatlantic phrase "waked up the wrong passenger?"

I began to feel misgivings. There was a simple means of satisfying myself—at least a probability of doing so. The Rue Dauphin could not be far off, and might soon be reached. If it should prove that M. Despard lived at No. 9, the mystery would be at an end.

I turned on my heel, and proceeded in the direction of the Rue Dauphin.

CHAPTER VI.

M. JACQUES DESPARD.

A HUNDRED yards brought me to the corner of this famous street, and twenty more to the front of No. 9—, a large crazy looking house, that had the appearance of a common hotel, or cheap boarding-house.

The door stood open, and I could see down a long dark hall. But there was no knocker. A brass-handled bell appeared to be the substitute, under which were the words—“*Tirez la sonette.*”

I climbed the rickety steps and rang. A slatternly female—a mulatto—half asleep, came slippering along the hall; and, on reaching the door, drawled out:—

“*Que voulez vous, Mosheu?*”

“Does M. Despard live here?”

“Moss’r Despard? *Oui—oui.*”

“Will you have the goodness to say that a gentleman wishes a word with him?”

The girl had not time to reply, before a side door was heard creaking open, and a head and shoulders were protruded into the hall. They were those of a man.

Though the hair of the head was tossed and frowsy, and the shirt that covered the shoulders looked as if it had passed through the “beggar’s mangle,” I had no difficulty in recognizing the wearer. It was M. Despard—M. Despard *en deshabille*.

The gentleman evidently regretted his imprudence, and would have withdrawn himself from view. The shirt and shoulders had already disappeared behind the screening of the lintel; but, before the head could be backed in, I had stepped over the threshold and “nailed him” to an interview.

“M. Despard, I believe?” was the interrogative style of my salutation.

“*Oui, M’sseu.* What is your business?”

“Rather a strange question for you to put, M. Despard. Perhaps you do not remember me?”

“Perfectly.”

“And what occurred at our first interview?”

"Equally well—that you were accompanied by a drunken brute who calumniated me."

"It is not becoming to vilify a gentleman after he has given you his card. Of course you intend to challenge him?"

"Of course I intend nothing of the sort. *Parbleu ! M'sseu*, I should have a busy time of it, were I to notice the babble of every drunken brawler. I can pardon the slang of sling drinkers."

I had discovered by this time that M. Despard spoke English as fluently as he did French, and also that he was perfectly versed in the slang epithets of our language.

"Come, Monsieur," said I, "this grandeur will not screen you. It shall be my duty to repeat your elegant phraseology to my friend, who I can promise will not pardon *you*."

"That don't signify."

"If you are not disposed to *send* a challenge, you will be compelled to *receive* one."

"Oh ! that is different. I shall be most happy to accept it."

"It would save time if you give me the address of your second."

"Time enough after I have received the challenge."

"In two hours, then, I shall demand it."

"*Tres bien, M'sseu*."

And with a stiff bow the *caput* of M. Despard disappeared into the dark doorway.

Turning away, I descended the creaking steps, and walked back along the Rue Dauphin.

On reaching the corner of Rue Royale, I paused to reflect. I had ample food for reflection—sufficient almost to bewilder me. Within ten minutes I had succeeded in

filling my hands with business enough to last me for the whole of that day and a portion of the next. The object of my halting, therefore, was that I might think over this business, and if possible arrange it into some kind of a definite programme.

An open cabaret close by offered an empty chair and a table. This invited me to enter; and, seating myself inside, I called for some claret and a cigar. These promised to lend a certain perspicuity to my thoughts, that would enable me to set my proceedings in some order.

My first thought was a feeling of regret at having promised M. Despard to call again. I knew that Casey would insist upon a meeting—all the more pertinaciously on hearing what had passed—and I was now more than ever convinced of the absurdity of such a step. What had he to gain by fighting with such a man? Certainly not his watch, and as certainly there was no credit to be derived from such an encounter. What I had just seen and heard, perfectly satisfied me that we were not dealing with a gentleman. The appearance of M. Despard in his morning *deshabille*—his vulgar behaviour and language—the *mise-en-scene* in the midst of which I had found him—and above all the nonchalant bravado with which he had treated Casey's serious charge against him—convinced me that the charge was true; and that instead of a gentleman we had to do with a *chevalier d'industrie*.

What, then, could Casey gain in measuring weapons with a character of this kind? Certainly nothing to his advantage.

On the other hand he might lose in the encounter, and in all probability he would.

A very painful reflection entered my mind as I dwelt upon this. If the fellow had designed it, he could not

have exhibited more skill in bringing circumstances about in his favour ; and only now did it occur to me the advantage we had given him. The positions of the parties had become entirely reversed. His adversary now held the citadel : Casey was to be the assailant. If the Frenchman intended to stand up—and under the altered circumstances it was likely he would—I feared for the result. He would have the right of choice ; the rapier would unquestionably be the weapon chosen ; and from the inexorable laws of the duello there would be no appeal.

As these considerations ran hurriedly through my mind, I began to feel sincerely anxious about the consequences ; and blamed myself for permitting my temper—a little frayed by the insulting language—to betray me into, what I now regarded as, a manifest imprudence. “*Facilis decensus averni, sed revocare gradum.*”

There was no retreating from the step I had taken. Casey’s antagonist might be a gambler, a swindler, a suspected thief, but in New Orleans—more especially at the time of which I write—these titles would not rob him of the right to demand the treatment of a gentleman—that is, if he offered to fight as one.

We had gone too far. I knew that we were so compromised that we must carry the thing to an end.

I had but one hope ; and this was that Monsieur Despard might after all prove a *bavard*, and show the white feather.

I must confess, however, that this hope was a very faint one. If the fellow had impressed me with an idea of his vulgarity, he had said or done nothing that could lead me to question his courage.

Up to this time, the tumult of my thoughts had hindered me from dwelling upon my odd encounter with the young

avocat. Since it had only happened fifteen minutes before, of course, I had not forgotten it ; and the affair of my friend being, in my mind, now arranged, it became necessary to attend to my own.

So ludicrous was the whole *contretemps*, that I could scarcely restrain laughter when I thought of it ; but there was also a serious side to the question, calculated to prevent any free ebullition of mirth.

Already, perhaps, M. De Hauteroche's messenger was on his way to the St. Charles Hotel ; and, on arriving there, I might find that besides having to play the easy *métier* of second in a duel, I should be called upon to enact the more serious *rôle* of a "principal."

Might find ! there was no *might* in the matter. I was as certain of it as if I already carried the challenge in my pocket.

I could not help reflecting upon the very awkward dilemma, into which a moment of evil indulgence had plunged both my friend and myself, and upon the very threshold of new world life. It seemed that we were to be initiated into its mysteries by a baptism of blood !

I was less uneasy about my own affair. My chief source of regret was, my having given pain and offence to a young gentleman, who appeared to be one of delicate susceptibility. Certainly my strange behaviour must have astonished him, as much as the after finding of his counterpart, and the resemblance between them, astonished *me*.

The likeness was really remarkable—though less than it would have been, had M. Despard been in full toilette, as I had first viewed him. The scar upon his cheek, moreover, I now observed and remembered. Why had I not thought of it before ?

With regard to my affair with M. De Hauteroche, the

course was simple and clear: an unqualified apology. I only hesitated as to the when and where to make it.

Should I go on to the hotel and meet his second? That would be a more ceremonious way of proceeding—the most *en regle*.

But the apology would require an explanation—the embroglio was curious and complicated—and the explanation could only be properly understood by giving the details *viva voce*.

I resolved, therefore, to waive all ceremony, and, trusting to the generosity of my accidental enemy, to return to him *in propria persona*.

Quaffing off my claret; and flinging away the stump of my cigar, I walked directly to No. 16, Rue Royale.

To my gratification I found the young *avocat* in his office; and I was further satisfied by perceiving that I was in good time. No message had yet been sent to the St. Charles—though I had no doubt that the military-looking gentleman whom I met in the office was upon the eve of such an errand. My appearance must have been as little expected as that of the “man in the moon.”

I shall not trouble the reader by detailing the apology. The explanation is known already. Suffice it to say, that when M. De Hauteroche heard it, he not only acted in the true spirit of a gentleman; but, from an enemy, became transformed into a friend. Perceiving that I was a stranger, he generously invited me to renew my visit; and, with a hearty laugh at the *outré* style of our introduction, we parted.

Casey's more serious affair was still upon my mind; and I hurried home to the hotel.

As I expected, Casey *would* send the challenge; and, as I almost confidently anticipated, the other *accepted* it.

It ended in a duel, and I need hardly add that swords were the weapons.

I refrain from giving a description of this duel, which differed only from about a million of others—minutely described by romance writers—in being one of the very shortest of combats. At the very first passage Casey received (and I esteemed it very fortunate that he did so) his adversary's sword through the muscles of his right arm—completely disabling him. That was all the satisfaction he ever got for the loss of his repeater!

Of course this rude thrust ended the combat; and M. Jacques Despard marched off the ground without a scratch upon his person or a blemish on his name.

Casey, however, still asserted—though, of course, not publicly—"that the fellow took the watch;" and I afterwards found good reason to believe ~~that~~ he *did* take it.

CHAPTER VII.

HOSPITABLE FRIENDS.

CASEY'S views were commercial, and New Orleans was not the place where a display of spirit would be likely to damage his prospects. It appeared rather to have an opposite effect; for, before his arm was well out of the sling, I had the gratification to learn that he had received an appointment in one of the large cotton commission houses—a calling sufficiently suited to his temperament.

My own object in visiting the Western World was less definite. I was of that age when travel is attractive—young enough to afford a few years of *far niente* before entering upon the more serious pursuits of life. In short,

I had no object beyond idleness and sight-seeing ; and in either way, a month or two may be passed in New Orleans without much danger of suffering from *ennui*.

My stay in the "Crescent City" extended to a period of full three months. A pleasant hospitality induced me to prolong it beyond what I had originally intended : and the dispenser of this hospitality was no other than M. Luis De Hauteroche.

Notwithstanding the *bizarrerie* of its beginning, our acquaintance soon grew into friendship ; for the southern heart is of free and quick expansion, as the flowers of its clime, and its affection as rapidly ripens. There the friendship of a single month is often as strong—aye, and as lasting too—as that which results from years of intercourse under the cold ceremonies of old world life.

In a month De Hauteroche and I were bosom friends ; and scarcely a day passed that we did not see each other, scarcely three that we were not companions in some boating or hunting excursion—some *fête champêtre* among his Creole acquaintances, the hospitable planters of the "coast,"—at the *bal-masque*, or in the boxes of the "Theatre Français."

In the morning hours I often visited him at his place of business—for business he did not altogether neglect—in the Rue Royale ; but more frequently in the evening at his private residence—the pretty little "cabane," as he called it, with its glass door windows and vine-loaded verandahs, in the adjoining street of the Rue Bourgogne.

This charming spot had a peculiar attraction for me. Was it the company of De Hauteroche himself or that of Adele, his fair sister, that drew me so often thither ? It must have been one or the other—for excepting the dark-skinned domestics, the two were the only inmates of the

house. I relished much the conversation of my young Creole friend—perhaps still more, the music which his sister understood how to produce upon her harp and guitar. Especially did the notes of the harp vibrate pleasantly upon my ear; and the picture of a fair maiden seated in front of that noble stringed instrument, soon impressed itself on my spirit, whether awake or dreaming. Adele became the vision of my dreams.

Without designing it, I soon became acquainted with the family history of my new friends. It was but the natural consequence of the confidential intercourse that had sprung up between us.

They were the orphan children of an officer of the Napoleonic army—an *ancien-colonel* of artillery—who, after the defeat of Waterloo, surrendered up his sword and sought an asylum in the Far West. He was but one of many, who, at that time, deprived of the patronage of their great leader, became *émigrés* by a sort of voluntary exile, finding in the French settlements of the New World—Louisiana among the rest—a kindred and congenial home.

In the case of Hauteroche, however, the habits of the military man had not fitted him either for a commercial life or that of a planter. His affairs had not prospered—and at his death, which had occurred but the year before—he had left his children little other inheritance than that of an excellent education and a spotless name.

Far otherwise had it been with a comrade who accompanied him in his exile—a brother officer of his regiment and a devoted bosom friend. The latter preferring the cooler climate of St. Louis, had gone up the river and settled there.

He was a Norman, and his young wife had accompanied

him. With the stauncher qualities of this race, he had devoted himself to commercial pursuits; and his perseverance was rewarded by the acquirement of an ample fortune—which, with his wife—also of Norman family—and an only daughter, he was now enjoying in opulent retirement.

The almost fraternal friendship of the two ex-officers was not extinguished by their altered mode of life; but, on the contrary, it continued as warm as ever during the period of their residence in the New World. Annually the “crate” of oranges from the south was sent up to St. Louis, and as often was the barrel of apples or walnuts—the produce of the more temperate clime—despatched in the opposite direction—a pleasant interchange of presents effected by the medium of the mighty Mississippi.

A personal intercourse, too, was at intervals renewed. Every two or three years the old colonel had indulged himself with a ramble on the prairies which lie contiguous to the settlements of St. Louis, while his brother officer, at like intervals, reciprocated the visit by a trip to the great southern metropolis, thus in a very convenient manner combining the opportunities of business and pleasure.

Under these circumstances it was natural that the families of De Hauteroche and Dardonville should be affectionately attached to each other, and such was in reality the case. I was constantly hearing of the latter—of the goodness of Madame Dardonville—of the beauty of Olympe.

It was nearly three years since either De Hauteroche or his sister had seen their St. Louis friends. Olympe, as was alleged, was then but a child; but the fervour with which the young avocat descanted upon her merits, led me to suspect that in his eyes at least, she had reached a very

interesting period of her childhood. Now and then the merry badinage of his sister on this point, bringing the colour to his cheeks, confirmed me in the suspicion.

My new acquaintances had admitted me as a link into the chain of their happy circle ; and for three months I enjoyed, almost without interruption, its pleasant hospitality.

It became a spell that was hard to break ; and when the hour of leave-taking arrived, I looked upon it as a painful necessity—though my absence did not promise to be a prolonged one.

The necessity was one of sufficient urgency. A July sun was glaring from the sky, and the yellow spectre had entered the Crescent City, upon its annual visit of devastation.

Already had it begun its ghastly work, and here and there presented itself in horrid mien. In those Faubourgs where dwelt the less opulent of the population, I observed traces of its presence ; that symbol of terrible significance—the red cross upon the closed door—telling too plainly that the destroyer had been there.

It would have been madness for me to have remained amidst a pestilence, from which it was so easy to escape. Twenty hours upon a fast boat, and I should be clear of the danger : and among the up-river towns I might make choice of an asylum.

Four large cities—Pittsburg, Louisville, Cincinnati, and St. Louis—lay beyond the latitude of the epidemic : all easy of access. In any of these I might find a luxurious home ; but I longed to look upon those boundless fields of green, for years the idol of my youthful fancy ; and I knew that St. Louis was the gate that guided to them. Thither, then, was I bound.

With regret I parted from my Creole friends. They had no need to fly or fear the scourge. Acclimatized in the middle of that vast *marais*, its malaria had for them neither terror nor danger. Immunity from both was their birthright, and New Orleans was their home throughout the year: though during the months of intolerable heat and utter stagnation of business, it was their habit to reside in one of the numerous summer retreats found upon the shores of Lake Pontchartrain.

I was in hopes they would have accompanied me to St. Louis, and I endeavoured to induce them to do so.

Luis seemed desirous, and yet declined! I knew not the delicate reason that influenced him to this self-denial.

I promised to return with the first frost; for this usually kills "Yellow Jack."

"Ah! you will not be here so soon?" said Adele, in a tone that pretended to be pensive. "You will like St. Louis too well to leave it. Perhaps when you have seen Olympe——"

"And what of Olympe?"

"She is beautiful—she is rich——"

"Those are qualities that more concern your brother; and if I should make love to Olympe, it will only be as his proxy."

"Ha! ha! a perilous prospect for poor Luis!"

"Oh, no! Luis need fear no rival; but, jesting apart, I should be glad to enter into a little covenant with him."

"A covenant?"

"Yes—the terms of which would be, that in St. Luis I should use all my interest in his favour, while he should here reciprocate, by employing his in mine."

"In what quarter, Monsieur?"

"Here, *at home*."

Adele's dark brown eyes rolled upon me a moment, as if in innocent astonishment ; and then, suddenly changing their expression, they danced and sparkled to a peal of merry laughter, which ended in the words :—

“Au revoir ! la première gelée, adieu ! adieu !”

Luis was outside, waiting to accompany me to the boat ; and, returning the adieu somewhat confusedly, I hurried up the steps of the verandah, and joined him.

In another hour I was upon the broad bosom of the “Father of Waters,” breasting his mighty current towards its far distant source.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VILLA DARDONVILLE.

Soon after my arrival in St. Louis, I called upon the Dardonvilles, and presented my letter of introduction. It was a sealed document, and I knew not the nature of its contents ; but from the effect produced I must have been the bearer of strong credentials. It placed me at once on a footing of intimacy with the friends of my friends.

The family did not reside in town, but at the distance of a mile or so from it. Their villa stood upon a high bluff of the river, commanding a view of the broad noble stream, and beyond the wooded lowlands of Illinois, stretching like a sea of bluish green to the far eastern horizon.

Nothing could exceed the attractions of this transatlantic home ; and the many visitors whom I met there, proved that they were appreciated. Dardonville, now rich, had retired from mercantile life, and offered a profuse hos-

pitality to his friends. Need I say that he had troops of them?

From the character of much of the company that I met there, it was easy to see what was the chief object of attraction. It was not the wines, his luxurious dinners, nor the joys of the *fête champêtre*, that brought to the villa Dardonville so many of the choice youth of the neighbourhood—the sons of rich planters and merchants—the young officers of the near military post. There was an influence far more powerful than these—Olympe.

Olympe was an heiress—a beauty—a belle.

In truth she was a lovely creature—one of those blonde, golden-haired beings, that appear to bring earth and heaven together, uniting in soft sweet harmony the form of a woman with the spirit of an angel.

She was still only a girl; but the precocity of that sunny clime promised the early development of her perfect form, already distinguished by charms of which she alone appeared unconscious.

It would have been no difficult matter to have fallen in love with Olympe—a far greater feat to have kept one's heart clear; and I rather congratulated myself that mine was already occupied. Happy might be the man who should be honoured by the first passionate throbbings of that young virginal bosom; but wretched he who should *vainly* aspire to that honour.

Perhaps it was my indifference that made me the favourite of Madame Dardonville; or was there something in the letter of my Creole friend that introduced me to her confidence? I knew not; but from the hour of my arrival this good lady admitted me to the intimacy of a confidential friendship.

Through this confidence I soon became acquainted with

the conjugal destiny of the lovely Olympe—so far as that could be controlled by the will of her parents. Louis De Hauteroche needed no backer in me. Notwithstanding his numerous and richer rivals, there was not much to fear, with such influence in his favour. Above all, the heart of Olympe was still free. I rejoiced on learning this ; for seeing this fair young creature beset by so many suitors—too young to receive proposals—I trembled for the fate of my friend. Madame Dardonville, however, was a good “duenna ;” and as for the retired merchant and *ancien lieutenant*, he had no idea of any danger. It was his design, and had been for years, that Olympe should marry Luis de Hauteroche, the son of his old comrade and friend—the son of his early benefactor, as he declared to me in the warmth of his amical enthusiasm, when we were one day conversing on the subject.

“Yes,” exclaimed he, “De Hauteroche is poor—so was his father before him ; but De Hauteroche was a gentleman of noble race, Monsieur—a true gentleman—and Luis must be—how could it be otherwise ?”

I assured him it was my own belief ; and in answer to many a question put both by Monsieur and Madame, I found the opportunity of making some slight return for the many kindnesses of my Creole friend. Had I made the covenant with Adele, I could not have been more zealous in carrying out my share of its conditions.

Such was the position I held in the Dardonville family previous to my starting for the prairies.

My excursion extended to the country of the “Crows,” and occupied a period of over three months. I also had the honour of an interview with the redoubtable “Black-feet” and the good fortune not to leave my scalp in the hands of these Ishmaelites of the prairies. I do not here

intend to detail to my reader the incidents of my prairie life. They have no bearing upon our narrative. I need only remark, that during my three months' residence in the wilderness I had no communication whatever with the civilized world, and never heard from any of the friends I had left behind on either side of the Atlantic. On my return to St. Louis, therefore, I found many items of news awaiting me—one of the most unexpected being the death of M. Dardonville! Congestive fever, after a short illness, had carried him off—not much beyond the prime of life, and just when he had accomplished a position of opulent independence. This is not an uncommon fate with men who seek rest and retirement after a life of continued activity.

My intimacy with the family suffered no interruption from this melancholy occurrence, though of course its character was somewhat changed. But Madame Dardonville was as friendly as ever—even more so I fancied—and for the few weeks that I remained at St. Louis, she pressed me to accept almost a constant hospitality. General society was no longer received at the villa : only those friends whose intimacy was of long standing.

That I had won Madame Dardonville's confidence, must be attributed to my relations with M. Luis De Hauteroche ; and to the same, no doubt, was I indebted for a singular secret that was entrusted to me on the eve of my departure for New Orleans. It was to the effect that her husband had made a most curious will—by which one half of his estate was left to his widow, the other to his daughter. There was nothing remarkable about this partition of the property, and it appeared to me to be equitable enough : but it was in another point that the will was oddly conditioned. This was, that in the event of Luis De Haute-

roche offering to marry Olympe, the latter should not be free to refuse, except under forfeiture of the legacy left her by her father; and this was to become the property of Luis De Hauteroche himself! In other words, the daughter of Dardonville was left by legacy to the son of his old friend—on such conditions as were likely to lead her to their acceptance, while young De Hauteroche was comparatively free in his choice. This I was assured by Madame Dardonville was the fruits of a profound gratitude for some early favour, which her husband had received at the hands of his former comrade De Hauteroche.

I thought it a fortunate circumstance, that the parties interested in this strange document were not likely to offer any opposition to its terms and conditions. It would prove only an idle instrument, and perhaps in a few months the writing contained in it would be no longer of any significance. My friend Luis would inherit the property of the rich merchant, and marry his daughter to boot. That would be the end of it.

I was curious to know if De Hauteroche had not yet heard of the fortune thus strangely conditioned to him, and I asked the question. The reply was "Not yet." There were reasons why he had not been told of it. But there was no longer any object in keeping the secret from him, and the Madame informed me that she had just written to him, enclosing a copy of her husband's will, and giving him a full explanation of her views upon the subject.

This conversation occurred upon the day before my departure from St. Louis. Madame Dardonville had dispatched her letter by mail. She expressed regret at not having entrusted it to me, but she was not apprised of my intention of leaving so soon. Indeed it was hastily taken.

La première gelée—the first frost had made its appearance, and I remembered my promise.

As I bade my adieus at the Villa Dardonville, the Madame also extracted a promise from me—to the effect that I should not speak of what she had told me—even to Luis himself. She was desirous that things should take their natural course.

CHAPTER IX.

THE POST-OFFICE.

ON my return to New Orleans, one of my earliest solitudes was about my European correspondence. There, letters are not delivered by a carrier, or were not at the time of which I speak. To obtain them, you must either send to the Post-office, or go for them yourself; and expecting some letters of importance, I chose the latter alternative.

I reached the office at the hour when the Atlantic steamer's mail was being delivered. As is usual at that time, there was a crowd around the delivery window; but by means of the simple contrivance of a gallery, or *coulisse*, each applicant was enabled to take his turn. I fell into rank, and awaited mine.

As we moved gradually forward, I could hear the different individuals asking for their letters—each giving his name, or sometimes both name and address.

Rarely was any question asked, beyond the demand for the amount of postage—the applicant paying it through the delivery-window, receiving the letter, and passing on to make room for the impatient gentleman in his rear.

I had arrived within some half dozen files of the box, when I heard pronounced a well-known name.

“*M. Luis De Hauteroche.*”

It was not very distinctly enunciated—in fact rather in a sort of muttered tone—but I could not be mistaken as to the name.

There was nothing to surprise me in this. The young lawyer was no doubt there to receive his morning correspondence, like any other man of business. I should not have given a thought to the circumstance, farther than to congratulate myself on the good fortune of having opportunely encountered my friend—since I was just on my way to call upon him, at his office. I say, I should have given no farther thought to the circumstance; but, just as the letter was being delivered, I overheard the words “From St. Louis,” pronounced by the delivery clerk. No doubt it was some matter relating to the amount of postage; but the phrase had a singular effect on my ears, and at once called up a train of ideas.

“So,” soliloquized I, “Monsieur Luis has received *the* letter. The mail must have come down by the same boat in which I travelled. Very amusing! I should know the contents of that epistle better than he. Ha! ha! ha! Perhaps the most important letter he ever received in his life! The opening of that envelope will reveal to him a world of happiness. Within, he will find the offer of a hand, a heart, and a fortune. Lucky fellow! he is indeed to be envied!”

I should have felt greatly inclined to have anticipated the post in its office, and to have had the pleasure of imparting the delicious news *viva-voce*, but was restrained by remembering the injunctions of Madame Dardonville. I was curious, however, to observe the effect which the letter

from St. Louis would produce upon my friend ; and I leaned over to catch a glimpse of his face. It might not be he who had inquired for the letter—some messenger from the office, perhaps,—and it now occurred to me that it was not his voice I had heard. But I was unable to determine the point. Three or four very stout tall fellows were in front ; and, twist myself as I might, I could not see over or around them. “Never mind !” thought I, “I shall follow him directly to his office, and then—”

This reflection was interrupted by observing my friend, as I supposed, emerge from the exit end of the slip, and pass into the street. I thought it was he, and yet I was not quite certain. His back was towards me ; but as he walked out of the portico, he turned slightly, and I caught a momentary glimpse of his side face. It was certainly like him ; but I was struck with a sudden impression that it was more like the face of M. Despard. This caused me to scrutinize the figure with more eagerness ; but some one stepped in front of me, and when I looked again, he was gone out of sight.

“It matters little,” thought I, “as I am on my way to De Hauteroche’s office, where, at this hour, I shall, no doubt, find him.”

After waiting as patiently as possible for my “turn,” I obtained it at length ; and, possessing myself of the expected letters, I sallied out into the street. I did not go direct to the office of my friend, but made a long detour—to give me time to glean the contents of my correspondence.

I arrived at length in the Rue Royale. As I had anticipated, De Hauteroche was in his office, and received me with a genuine expression of welcome.

He was differently dressed from the man I had seen—

in a coat altogether unlike ! There was hardly time to have changed it ? It could not have been he !

"*Parbleu !* my friend, what's the matter ?" he inquired, observing my astonishment. "Do you perceive any change in me since we parted ? I hope none for the worse, eh ?"

"Answer me !" said I, without replying to his question "How long have you had that coat on ?"

"Ha ! ha ! what an eccentric question ! ha ! ha ! ha ! I fear, *mon ami*, you have left more than your heart in St. Louis, ha ! ha ! ha !"

"Nay, please answer my question—how long ?"

"To-day, do you mean ?"

"Yes, to-day."

"Oh ! about an hour. It is my business coat. I put it on when I came into the office, about an hour ago."

"And you have not had it off since ?"

"No."

"You have not been out of the office either ?"

"Not that I am aware off, *mon ami* ; but pray why do you make these inquiries ?"

"Simply because I fancied I saw you just now."

"Where ?"

"At the Post-office."

"Oh, no ! I was not there. I never go. I always send for my letters ; it is so unpleasant, squeezing through the horrid crowd."

"I certainly saw some one wonderfully like you ; and now I am convinced of what I had only suspected, that he whom I saw was that same gentleman, to whom I am indebted for your acquaintance."

"*Peste !*" exclaimed the young Creole, springing to his feet, and assuming a serious countenance. "Likely enough it may be. *Mon Dieu !* this is intolerable. Do you know,

my friend, that I am frequently mistaken for him, and he for me ; and what is still worse, I have reason to believe that the fellow has, on more than one occasion, personated me. *Mère de Dieu !* it is not to be borne ; and if I can only get proof of it—I am even now about the affair—if I can only establish the proofs, I shall effectually put a stop to it. He shall find I can handle the small sword a little more skilfully than your unfortunate friend. *Mon Dieu !* it is infamous : a common *sportsman*—a swindler—even worse, I have heard ; and to think how my character suffers ! Why no later than yesterday, would you believe it, I was joked by one of my oldest and most respected friends, for having figured at a low quadrone ball in the Faubourg Tremé ! It is positively vexatious !”

Of course I assented to this denunciation, and to the necessity of some inquiry being made into the goings on of M. Jacques Despard. During my winter sojourn in New Orleans, I had more than once dropped accidentally upon this last mentioned personage, but never did I observe him in any very creditable position. It did not need the declaration of De Hauteroche, to prove to me that he was both *sportsman* (gambler) and swindler ; but just then other matters came before my mind. I was the bearer of a pretty little billet from Olympe to Adele ; and the hour had arrived in which it was proper for me to make my call and deliver it. Leaving my friend, therefore, to his books and briefs, I went off upon my errand.

I was a little puzzled at De Hauteroche's behaviour. He must have received the letter in time to have read it before my arrival at the office ; and yet I observed none of the effect that the reading of such an important document would be likely to produce. On further reflection I felt convinced that he could not have read it at all. Perhaps

his messenger, who had taken it from the post-office, had not returned. Or, what was likely enough, it might not be *that* letter, but some other one of no importance, or more probable still, there might have been none, and I had mistaken the name. Certainly, if it were the epistle I supposed it to be, and if he had already perused it, the effect was far from what I should have expected. Of course I did not imagine he would appear in ecstasies in my presence, and all at once reveal to me the secret of his happiness; but, on the other hand, I could not account for the imperturbable coolness he had exhibited throughout our short interview—his thoughts, indeed, only occupied by vexation at the unfortunate resemblance he bore to the gambler. Of course, then, he could have had no letter—at least not one that offered him a wife and a fortune. I might have ascertained this to a certainty by simply putting a question, and some vague suspicion floating about in my mind, half prompted me to do so; but I remembered the caution which I had received from the little Madame Dardonville—besides, it was a delicate point, and I dreaded being deemed a meddler. After all, I had no doubt about the matter. His supreme happiness was still unknown to him. The messenger of glad tidings had not yet arrived. The next mail-boat would bring the precious epistle, and then——

I had entered the vine-shadowed verandah in the Rue Bourgogne. The green *jalousie* opened at the sound of my steps; and those beautiful brown eyes, smiling upon me through the fringework of the white curtains, carried my thoughts into a new current. Luis and his affairs were alike forgotten. I had eyes and thoughts only for Adele.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER EPISTLE.

THE hospitality of my Creole friends had not cooled in my absence, and my visits were as frequent as of yore. I had now much to tell them of. My prairie excursion had furnished me with facts—deeds upon which I could descant. It pleased me to fancy I had an attentive listener in Adele. I could make Luis listen too at times—especially when I dwelt upon the merits of Olympe. No doubt it would have flattered me to believe that Adele was a little jealous, but I could not tell. I only knew that she liked better to hear me discourse upon the wonders of prairie land, than to listen to the praises of Olympe. But Adele had much romance in her disposition, and the plumed and painted horsemen of the plains—the chivalry of modern days—almost rival in interest the steel-clad heroes of the mediæval time—certainly they are quite as brave, and perhaps not much more barbaric.

My visits to the Rue Bourgogne were of daily recurrence. Besides the other occupation, I could not help closely regarding the behaviour of Luis. I was watching for some sign, but day after day passed without his showing any. The letter had not yet come to hand. My position was a strange one. With one word I could have made De Hauteroche supremely happy ; and yet my promise hindered me from uttering that word. It was really tantalizing to be thus restrained—for the pleasure of giving happiness is almost equal to that of receiving it.

A week passed, and still no word—no sign of the letter having been received ; and then the half of another week without report. Two mail-packets I knew had come down

from St. Louis—for I had taken the pains to ascertain this fact—but neither brought the precious epistle.

Had Madame Dardenville not written after all? or had her letter miscarried?

The former I could not reconcile with probability, after what she had said: the latter was perfectly probable, considering the character of the American post-office, and the adventurous vagaries that sometimes occur to an American mail bag, in its transit upon the great western rivers.

Still the route from St. Louis to New Orleans was a direct one. There was but one shipment from port to port, and where could be the risk?

I was puzzled, therefore, at the non-arrival of the letter. In truth, I was something more than puzzled. At times I felt a vague feeling of uneasiness as to its fate; and this was more definite, when I reflected on the incident that had occurred at the post-office on the morning after my return. I could not well doubt that some one asked for a letter for Luis De Hauteroche; for though the words were mumbled in a low tone, they reached my ear with sufficient distinctness. At the time I had not the shadow of a doubt about the name.

Did De Hauteroche receive a letter that morning, and from St. Louis? For reasons given, I had never asked him, but I could no longer see any harm in putting the question. If an unimportant letter, he might not remember it; and whether or no, the question would surprize and puzzle him. But no matter. It was important I should have an answer—yes or no. I needed that to resolve a doubt—a dark suspicion that was shaping itself in my mind.

I came to the determination to call upon him: and at once put the interrogatory—*outré* as it might seem.

I was preparing to sally forth from my hotel chamber, when a somewhat impetuous knock at the door announced an impatient visitor. It was the man I was about to seek—Luis De Hauteroche himself.

I saw that he was strangely excited about something.

“My friend,” he exclaimed on entering, “what can this mean? I have just had a letter from St. Louis—from Madame Dardonville—and for the life of me I cannot comprehend it. It speaks of a will—of conditions—of Olympe—of strange contingencies. *Mon Dieu!* I am perplexed. What is it? You have lately seen Madame. Perhaps you can explain it? Speak, friend! can you?”

While giving utterance to this incoherent speech, De Hauteroche had drawn out a letter, and thrust it into my hand. I opened and read:—

“Mon cher Luis,—Since my letter, accompanying the copy of my lamented husband’s will, I find that my duties as administratrix will detain us in St. Louis a week longer than I had anticipated. If you have not started, therefore, before receiving this, I wish to suggest a change in our programme—that is, instead of coming alone, you should bring Adele along with you, and we can all return together. Perhaps your young English friend would be of the party; though, from the anxiety which he exhibited at the first appearance of frost here, perhaps he thinks our St. Louis climate too cold for him. He shall be welcome notwithstanding.”

“You could come by the “Sultana,” which I see by the New Orleans papers is to sail on the 25th. Come by her if possible, as she is our favourite boat, and I should wish to go back in her.”

“Yours sincerely,

“Emilie Dardonville.”

"P.S.—Remember, Luis, that your choice is free, and though I shall be proud to have you for my son-in-law, I shall put no constraint upon Olympe. She knows the conditions of her father's will, and I have no fear of her desiring to controvert what was with him a dying wish. I am well assured that her heart is still her own; and since you have always been the favourite friend of her childhood, I think I might promise you success as a suitor. But in this, and everything else relating to the conditions of the will, you must act, dear Luis, as your heart dictates. I know your honourable nature, and have no fear you will act wrongly."

"E. D."

By the time I had finished reading, De Hauteroche had become more collected.

"When did you last hear from Madame Dardonville?" I asked.

"About a month ago—only once since the letter announcing our friend's death."

"And your sister—has she had a letter since?"

"None—except the note brought by yourself from Olympe."

"That could not be the letter referred to here. There was no copy of a will?"

"I never heard of such a thing. This is the first intimation I have had, that M. Dardonville had made a will; and the postscript both surprises and perplexes me. Madame Dardonville speaks of conditions—of Olympe being bound by some wish of her father! What conditions? What wish? Monsieur, for heaven's sake, explain to me if you can!"

"I can."

CHAPTER XL

THE CHEQUE.

DE HAUTEROCHE stood before me in an appealing attitude, and with wild impatience in his looks. I felt that I was going to give him supreme happiness—to fill his cup of bliss to the very brim. I had long ere this fathomed the secret of his heart, and I knew that he loved Olympe with a passionate ardour that he could scarcely conceal. His last visit to St. Louis had settled that point, and though it was doubtful whether the young girl was, at the time, sufficiently forward to have felt the passion of love, I had discovered some traces of a certain tender regard she had exhibited towards him. I had no doubt that she would love him—almost at sight: for to say nothing of the direction which had been given to her thoughts—both parents carefully guiding her affections in the one particular channel—there were other circumstances that would favour this result. Luis De Hauteroche was by far the handsomest gentleman she had ever seen—handsome as well as highly accomplished—and I knew that no pains had been spared to impress Olympe with this idea. He was almost certain to be beloved by her.

Concealment of what I knew, was no longer required of me. My promise to Madame Dardonville was simply to keep silent, until the letter had spoken for itself. It was clear, however, that the letter had miscarried; and it therefore became a necessity that I should declare its contents. I rather joyed at thus having it in my power to make my friend happy; and I hastened to perform the pleasant duty.

In brief detail I made known to him the nature of the

ex-merchant's will—that part of it relating to his daughter and to Luis himself.

Joy overspread the young man's countenance as he listened; and my repetition of those interesting conditions was interrupted only by expressions of gratitude and delight.

For the rest, I knew not the precise contents of Madame Dardenville's letter. These could only be guessed at; but the communication just now received was a good key to that which had been lost.

"What matter," added I, "about the other having gone astray? It is certainly not very agreeable that some post-office peeper should get such an insight into one's family affairs; but after all, it's only a *copy* of the will that has been lost."

"Oh! the will; I care nothing for that, Monsieur—not even if it were the original—the will of Olympe alone concerns me."

"And that I promise will be also in your favour."

"*Merci*, Monsieur, what a true friend you have proved! How fortunate I should have resembled M. Despard! Ha! ha!"

I almost echoed the reflection—for that resemblance had been the means of introducing me to Adele.

"But come, Monsieur De Hauteroche! the letter of Madame Dardenville requires attention. You must answer the demand. You are expected in St. Louis, to bring the ladies down to New Orleans. If I mistake not the *Sultana* leaves here this very evening; you must go by her."

"And you will go with me? You perceive, Monsieur, you are invited."

"And M'amselle De Hauteroche?"

"Oh! certainly. Adele will go too. In truth, my

sister has not travelled much of late. She has only been once to St. Louis since papa's death. I am sure she will enjoy the trip exceedingly. And you will go, then?"

"Willingly. Your sister will need time for preparation. Shall we proceed to the Rue de Bourgogne?"

"*Allons!* on our way we can call at the post-office. Perhaps the missing letter is still lying there—we may yet recover it."

"It can matter little now, I fancy; but there is no harm in trying."

I had not much hope of success. Something whispered to me that the document was gone from the post-office, and had fallen into other hands: though of what use could it be to any one? Perhaps it had been detained by some one, in the expectation that it contained an enclosure of money—an occurrence which the loose arrangements of the American post-office rendered by no means uncommon.

I was now more than ever convinced of the correctness of my first impressions. On that morning when I visited the post-office, a letter for De Hauteroche had been asked for and taken out; and as he now informed me that he had received no letter, nor did he remember having sent any one to the office on that particular day—there was but one conclusion to be drawn. Some one, unauthorized by him, had obtained the letter—no doubt the very one in question.

The coincidence of Despard's presence—for it must have been he whom I had mistaken for De Hauteroche—led me to other misgivings. I had not seen the person who made inquiry for the letter—the files of men in front preventing me—but judging by the time at which the *sportsman* passed out at the exit end of the slip, he must have been

near the delivery window when the inquiry was made. These circumstances, taken in connection with what I already knew of this person, naturally led me to the conclusion that De Hauteroche's letter had fallen into his hands. His motive for such a vile act I could only guess at. The hope of obtaining money, perhaps—though there might appear but slight probability of that. In truth, the affair was sufficiently inexplicable; and neither De Hauteroche nor I could arrive at any definite resolution of it at the time.

On our arriving at the post-office, a gleam of light was thrown upon the transaction.

"Has there been any letter addressed to M. Luis De Hauteroche?"

The inquiry referred to a date of some days anterior.

The clerk could not answer that—indeed the question was rather an idle one. Of course, amidst the thousands of letters delivered by the official, it would have been miraculous in him to have remembered a particular one. He had no recollection of such a letter being delivered; and there was none for the address lying in the office.

"Stay—there *is* a letter that has just come in by an extra mail, for "M. Luis De Hauteroche."

My friend eagerly grasped the document—the more eagerly that he saw upon it the stamp of the St. Louis post-office! It was scarcely large enough to contain the copy of a will. It could hardly be that of which we were in search.

It proved not to be that, but a document of a very different character. It read thus:

"Monsieur,—The 1,000 dolls. cheque transmitted to you upon the Planters' Bank of New Orleans, by a mistake of

one of our clerks, was not crossed. It has been paid by the Bank and returned. We are anxious to know if it reached your hands safely. Please state by return mail.

"Gardette & Co.,

"Bankers,

"St Louis,

"Mi."

"Mystery of mysteries, Monsieur!" exclaimed De Hauteroche, gasping for breath, as he thrust the letter into my hands. "What can all this mean? I know of no thousand dollars. Never received a cheque—never expected one—know of no one in St. Louis who should have sent it, nor for what purpose! Ho! there must be a mistake. This is not for me."

And the speaker once more referred to the envelope. But the address was full and complete:—

"M. Luis De Hauteroche,

"Avocat,

"16, Rue Royale,

"New Orleans."

There was no other Luis De Hauteroche—no other avocat of the name. Undoubtedly the letter was for him—however little he understood its contents.

I was less puzzled than he. A gleam, or rather a flood of light, was let in upon the mysterious transaction, which to me was no longer a mystery. Whence had come the cheque I could not tell. I could only surmise; and my surmise pointed to the hand of the generous widow of Dardonville. Where it had gone was unfortunately less doubtful,—for the fingers of the *chevalier d'industrie* were

easily recognizable here. Beyond a doubt, M. Despard had got the cheque ; and this would account for his after inquiry at the post-office, that led to his obtaining the letter with the will. He had watched the arrival of the mails from St. Louis, and obtained such letters as were addressed to De Hauteroche. Why he had done this at first, it would be difficult to say ; but afterwards—after obtaining the money—his object would be to prevent the young lawyer from knowing it, until he could get out of the way.

In all likelihood he was now beyond reach either of accusation or conviction. The two letters which had just come to hand were of themselves evidence, that in all likelihood he was no longer near.

De Hauteroche was furious—half frantic when I imparted to him my convictions ; for, although the source whence the 1,000 dollars had come, was still a mystery to him, yet there was the proof of its having been sent, and the presumption of its having been stolen.

The New Orleans police were at once put in charge of the matter ; and, as no communication could possibly reach St. Louis sooner than by the *Sultana*, it was resolved that we ourselves should be the bearers of the answer, and call upon the banking-house of Gardette and Co., the moment we arrived in that city.

Detectives were set upon the search for Despard, but of course only as spies—since as yet we could allege nothing stronger than suspicion against him. The *espionage*, however, was likely to prove unsuccessful : for up to the hour of the *Sultana's* leaving—which occurred just at sunset—the sportsman's whereabouts had not been ascertained ; and the detectives, in quaint phraseology, declared their belief that the “gentleman was G. T. T.” (Gone To Texas).

CHAPTER XII.

THE MISSOURI BELLE.

THE traveller who ascends the mighty Mississippi, will see neither hill nor mountain—nothing that can be called highland—until he has attained a thousand miles from its mouth. Only the bold headland on which stands the town of Natchez, and those very similar projections known as the “Chickasaw Bluffs,” one of which forms the site of the flourishing city of Memphis. All the rest, on both sides of the river, as far as the eye can reach, is low *alluvion*, rising only a few feet above the surface of the stream, and often, for hundreds of miles, periodically drowned by inundation, or covered continuously by a stagnant marsh. The forest hides all this from the eye ; and frequently the banks of the river have the appearance of dry land, when there is not a spot of earth upon which you may rest your foot.

This character continues till you have passed the mouth of the Ohio, and have entered upon the regions of Missouri and the Illinois. There the scene changes as if by magic. The river no more appears wandering over a flat country ; but runs in the bottom of a deep gorge or valley, whose sides are nearly precipitous—often rising to the height of hundreds of feet above the surface of the water.

We had been six days steaming up the river ; and on the seventh at sunset, the *Sultana* reached the highland region, entering the gorge-like valley, just as night was closing over it.

It was the period of a full moon, and as yet the fair queen was low in the heavens—so low that her light fell

upon the water, only in those reaches where the river trended in an easterly or westerly direction.

Whenever the course was north or south—and this was the general direction—the high bluffs completely overshadowed the stream ; and then only the glare of the fires lit up the dark water ravine through which we were passing.

The sudden changes from light to darkness, and from darkness back to brilliant moonlight, had an effect that was curious and interesting. They resembled the transformations in a theatre. One moment we were steaming along in the most sombre shadow—the crest of the bluff, with its crowning trees and *shot* towers, dimly outlined above us—the next, we would shoot out under the white fulness of the moonlight, that rendered even minute objects along the *façade* of the banks, almost as visible as by day.

This ever-shifting panorama appeared more the work of magic, than the effect of natural causes, and I had lingered upon the hurricane-deck to observe its changes long after my companions had gone below.

While thus engaged, my ear caught the peculiar sound produced by the 'scape pipe of a high-pressure boat ; and which is easily distinguished from all other explosive noises. At first it seemed the echo from our own—for I had already noticed the reverberations which the cliffs sent back at different points on our passage. I soon became convinced that the sounds I now heard were not echoes ; but that another boat was making its way through the dark gorges, apparently coming down stream. This was made certain by the sudden appearance of a brilliant lamp directly in front of us, and more conspicuous still was the

red glare of the fires burning in the furnaces—which are always placed in the forward part of the boat.

It was one of the darkest ravines of the river, where the two boats came in sight of each other; but the lights of each guided the pilot of the other, and there was neither danger nor difficulty in passing. Each held to the larboard—as two carriages would have done upon an ordinary road—and a wide space was left between them: for the channel, though narrower here than elsewhere, still afforded a sufficiency of room.

It was quick work, however, and the pilot of each boat adroitly performed his duty. The bend was of short reach; and, from the time I caught sight of the descending steamer, I could scarcely have counted two hundred till she had met and was overlapping the *Sultana*. Like two fiery meteors they brushed past one another—each bearing onward in her own direction, without hail or the exchange of a single word. I had just time, as the stranger glided by, to make out upon her wheelhouse the name *Missouri Belle*; but, before I could have counted another hundred, she had forged round a projection of the bluffs, and her lights were no longer visible.

I stood gazing after her with emotions vivid and singular. What was there that caused me to do so? The incident of meeting a steamboat on the Mississippi? There was nothing extraordinary in that—an occurrence so common as scarcely to deserve being regarded an incident. Was it the name of the boat, which I had been enabled to decipher? Some old remembrance connected with her?

No, nothing of the kind. The emotions that had suddenly arisen in my mind, were springing from a very different cause; and I may at once declare it.

Abaft of the *Missouri Belle*, and in the little gangway that encircles the ladies' cabin, I had caught sight of a group of three persons, standing outside one of the state-room doors. Of the identity of these persons I could not be mistaken—though the sight was sufficient to stagger my belief. Of two I was sure: for the light shone more fairly upon them. The third only remained unrecognized—the darkness hindering my view of this individual—and, but for a horrid suspicion that flashed into my brain at the moment, I should not have thought of even guessing at his identity.

The two that I had recognized were women—ladies. They were Madame Dardonville and her daughter Olympe. The third was a man, who stood sufficiently near them to come under the same light—the glare of the *Sultana's* fires—but the unexpected presence of the ladies so astounded me, that I did not see *him* till too late to distinguish either his form or face. I only saw that it was a man—nothing more; but, for all that, a painful suspicion—a presentiment of some horrid evil—took immediate possession of my soul; and I became at once imbued with the idea that my friends were in danger.

Gladly would I have adopted the belief that there was some error; and that what I had seen was a fancy—a vision of the brain. Certainly the glimpse I had of those fair faces—especially of the beautiful countenance of Olympe—was short and evanescent as any dream could have been; but it was too real. I saw her face well enough to recognize it—well enough even to note its expression, which I fancied to be more sad than smiling. Beyond a doubt the widow and her daughter had passed us in the *Missouri Belle*—strange though the circumstance might and did appear to me at the moment.

And what, after all, was there strange in it? Could it not be easily explained? Her affairs may have been settled earlier than she expected—they should have been arranged by that time—and, without waiting for De Hauteroche, she may have formed the resolution to travel without him. The journey from St. Louis to New Orleans is accounted nothing; and in all parts of the States ladies are accustomed to travel alone, and may do so with perfect safety and convenience.

But, then, they were *not* alone—at least they did not appear to be. There was the man—*the man!*

Some friend, perhaps, of the family? Some distant relative or retainer? Perhaps, only a domestic?

Could I have believed this, I should have escaped that feeling of uneasiness that was every moment growing upon me; but I could not. Something seemed to tell me, that the man I had seen was neither relative nor friend—but an *enemy*. Something seemed to whisper his name—*M. Jacques Despard*.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TWO PILOTS.

My suspicions were only vague and ill-defined. I had the presentiment of an evil—but what evil? Even admitting that the man who accompanied Madame Dardonville and her daughter, was the swindler Despard—what injury could they receive from his presence? But what reason had I to think it was he? Not the least. Indeed, upon reflection, I could not myself imagine what had brought this man into my mind: though that might be accounted

for—since the forgery, of which we more than suspected him, was one of the first things to be inquired into, on our arrival in St. Louis—and there we should be in the morning.

There was little reason, however, in all this, to connect him with the presence of the ladies on board the *Missouri Belle*; and the more I reflected on the matter, the more improbable did it appear.

The circumstance of meeting Madame Dardonville on her way downward, was certainly strange enough—especially when I remembered her letter. In that she had distinctly arranged that we should come up for her; and had stated her intention to travel back by the *Sultana*. Had she written again, and once more altered the arrangement? It had been her original design, as appeared by her second letter—to have gone to New Orleans at an earlier date; but some business, connected with the administration of her estate, had delayed her. Was this cause of detention unexpectedly removed? and had she, in consequence, started southward, without waiting for the *Sultana*? Perhaps she had written a third letter, which had not reached New Orleans at the time of our leaving it?

All these were probabilities—or rather possibilities—that passed through my mind; but, viewing them in their most favourable aspect, they failed to satisfy me. I could not help suspecting that there was a mystery—that there was something wrong.

The pilot was at his post inside his little cabin of glass, silent as is his wont. I would have entered into conversation with him; but just at that moment his second appeared, coming out of the pilot's cabin, and rubbing his eyes to get them open for his work. A bell had just announced the hour of change, and the second was about

to enter on his turn of duty. The ceremony was simple ; and consisted in the old pilot handing over the spokes to the one that relieved him, and then squeezing himself out of the glass house. A little conversation followed before the relieved officer retired to his "bunk." Seated within ear-shot, I could not help overhearing it.

"Durnation dark—whar are we anyhow ? "

"Jest below *Shirt-tail* bend—thar's the bluff."

"Durn me ! if I can see a steim. I couldn't see a white hoss at the eend of my nose this minnit. I reckon I'll be runnin' the old boat into the bank, if it don't clear a bit."

It certainly was a dark night. Some heavy clouds had drifted over the moon, and she was no longer visible.

"Oh, no fear," rejoined the other, you ain't got the sleep out of your eyes, you'll see clearer byn' bye."

"Wal—it's to be hoped. Much dirt in the water ? "

"A few—there's a putty considerable drift comin down. That last spell o' wet has done it, I reckon. I han't seed many *sawyers*, but you'd better keep a sharp look-out. Thar's bound to be some o' 'em settled in the bend."

"I'll watch 'em—say, what boat was that ? "

"*Massoury Belle*"

"Oh ! she's in the Ohio trade now ? "

"So I've heerd."

"I thought they wouldn't run her to Orleans agin. She aint the style for below."

"No, she wa'nt big enough. Old What's-his-name has bought her, and 's goin' to run her reg'larly 'tween St. Louis and Cinc'natti. She's jest the thing for that trade. Good night ! "

Thus ended the dialogue ; and, in a few seconds after, the retiring officer had entered one of the little boxes

adjacent to the wheel-house, and shut himself up for the night.

Up to a certain point I had listened to this conversation with but little attention, and might not have noticed it at all, but for its quaint oddity. All at once, however, it became deeply interesting to me—at that point when it turned upon the *Missouri Belle*.

What could the man mean by the boat no longer running to Orleans? New Orleans, of course, he meant—for these men are perfect Lacons in conversation, and I understood the curtailment of the name. Was it possible the boat was not *then* on her way to New Orleans? and was she bound round to Cincinatti?

If such were the case, the presence of Madame Dardonville on board of her, would indeed be a mysterious circumstance! For what purpose could *she* be going to Cincinatti? and, least of all, at such a crisis—when she should be expecting her friends from the south?

Had I heard aright? Or had I properly interpreted what I had heard?

Beyond doubt the pilot's words were to the effect, that the boat was no longer to run to New Orleans, but from St. Louis to Cincinatti, and of course *vice versâ*. Perhaps he might mean prospectively? Was it some new arrangement of ownership, not yet completed?

The boat might be hereafter intended for the Ohio trade, but had not yet commenced running to Cincinatti: she might be making her final trip to New Orleans? Only this hypothesis could explain the puzzle.

It occurred to me that I might arrive at a more lucid understanding by an application to the occupant of the wheel-house—at all events he could interpret what I had just heard. I addressed myself to him accordingly.

I had no fear of being snubbed. These Mississippi pilots are fine fellows, sometimes a little dry with curious intruders, but never rude, never impolite to a gentleman.

"Did I understand you to say that the boat we have just met—the *Missouri Belle*—is in the Ohio trade?"

"Wal, stranger, that's what I've heerd."

"That means that she is to run between St. Louis and Cincinatti."

"Course it do."

"And do you think she is on her way to Cincinatti now?"

"Why, stranger, whar else 'ud she be goin'?"

"I thought she might be going down to New Orleans."

"Wal, she did run thar form'lly; but she's off that now. She's changed hands lately, and's been put on the other line, 'tween St. Louis and Cinc'natti, which air a trade she'll suit for better. She wa'nt big enough for below; but bein' a light draught critter, she's jest the thing to get over the Falls."

"And you are certain she is now on the way to Cincinatti?"

"No, that I aint, stranger. She may be on top o' a durnation snag, or chuck up on a sand-bar at this minnit, for what I can tell. All I know for sartin is that she's boun' for Cinc'natti; and if nothin' happens her, she'll be thar in less 'n four days from now. Whether she breaks down, howsomever, air a question beyont my calkerlations. She mout an' she mout not."

With this sublime resignation to probabilities, the tall speaker in the glass house, evidently intended that the conversation should come to a close, for I observed that he bent his gaze more eagerly ahead, and seemed to direct his attention exclusively to the tiller. Perhaps the idea of

the *Missouri Belle* resting upon a snag or sand-bar, had suggested the probability of the *Sultana* getting into a similar predicament, and stimulated him to increased caution in the performance of his duty.

Though I had succeeded in concealing my emotions from the steersman, it was not without an effort. The information he imparted was full of serious meaning; and augmented the feeling of uneasiness, from which I already suffered. Stronger than ever did I feel that presentiment of evil.

The statement of the pilot admitted of no interpretation but one. It was direct and point blank: that the *Missouri Belle* was bound for Cincinatti. The man could have no motive for misleading me. Why should he? I had asked a simple question, without much show of interest or curiosity; he had answered it from pure politeness. There was not the slightest reason why he should make a misstatement; and I accepted what he had said as the truth.

The riddle had assumed a new character, and had become altogether more difficult of solution. "What," I repeated to myself, "can Madame Dardonville have to do on a Cincinatti boat? Surely there is something astray?"

It did not appear exactly *en regle*, for the lady to leave St. Louis in the expectation of a visit from her New Orleans friends; but I presumed she had sent a second despatch, which had not been received. Moreover, she was going down to them, and it mattered less about their coming up for her. These were my first reflections after seeing her upon the down-river boat, and until I had heard the talk of the two pilots. Now, however, circumstances had a different appearance. On the *Missouri Belle* she could not be going to New Orleans, but to Cincinatti. Did she expect us to follow her there? and for what end?

Perhaps she would only go as far as the Ohio mouth, in this boat, and there wait for another, coming down the Ohio river? This method of getting from St. Louis to New Orleans was common enough, when there did not chance to be a boat going direct. The large hotel at Cairo offered a temporary sojourn for such passengers. But why should Madame Dardonville adopt this roundabout method, and especially at such a time?

A score of conjectures passed through my mind, all ending idly. The only one at all satisfactory, was that, perhaps, I had been in an error from the very beginning. Perhaps, after all, I had neither seen Madame Dardonville nor her daughter; but two ladies who very much resembled them! It was not the first *equivoque* I had experienced; and this should have rendered me less confident of the evidence of my senses. Notwithstanding these reflections, however, I could not convince myself that I was in error.

So long, therefore, as there was the slightest doubt, I felt that it would be imprudent to communicate my suspicions to my travelling companions. It could serve no good purpose; and would only render them uneasy, as I was myself,—in all likelihood, much more so. Ere long we should all know the truth; and should it prove that I was mistaken, I would have the satisfaction of having saved my friends from unnecessary pain, and myself from ridicule.

Though I joined them the moment after, I gave neither of them the slightest hint of what I had seen or suspected.

CHAPTER XIV.

NO ONE ON THE WATCH.

It was ten o'clock on the following day, when the *Sultana*, snorting under a full head of steam, brought us within sight of the "Mound City," so called from certain Indian tumuli, that here form a conspicuous feature on the banks of the mighty river.

Long before reaching our destination, my travelling companions and I had ascended to the hurricane-deck; and we were straining our eyes to catch sight, not of the spires and cupolas that overtop the town, but of a building that had for all of us a far greater interest—a white cottage or villa, with green venetians—the villa Dardonville. As it stood conspicuously near the western bank of the river, and we knew that it was visible from the level of the water, we expected soon to be gratified with a view of it, especially, as we were now nearly opposite to it. A skirting of oak woods appeared alone to conceal it; and, as the boat forged a-head, we gazed eagerly into the vista that was gradually opening beyond them.

Slowly and gently, as if by the passage of a panoramic picture, the villa was disclosed to our view; and my companions hailed its appearance with exclamations of delight. Visions of a happy meeting with old dear friends, of sumptuous hospitality, of free rural enjoyments, of many pleasurable incidents, were before the minds of both; and as for Luis, the sight of that pretty homestead could not fail to call up emotions of a still more thrilling kind.

Though I had myself seen the villa before, and from the water, it was a new sight to both my friends. It was, in fact, a new house, and had been built by Dardonville on

retiring from business. On Luis's last visit to St. Louis, the family was residing in the city. It was shortly after, that they had removed to the charming abode on the bluff.

My friends were enthusiastic in their praises of the pretty mansion. They admired its style of architecture, its smooth sloping lawn, its shrubberies; in short, both were in the mood for admiring.

As the boat arrived directly in front of it, and the house came fully into view, it did not strike me as presenting so hospitable an appearance: in fact, an observer, knowing nothing of its inmates, would have given it a character altogether different. The front door was shut close; and so, too, were the venetian shutters, every one of them. Even the gate of the verandah railings appeared to be latched and locked. There was no life, human or animal, stirring about the place; not a creature to be seen. There was no smoke issuing from the chimneys, not a film. The place had the appearance of being uninhabited, deserted!

My companions could not help noticing this, though without having any suspicion that the house might be empty.

"Why are the windows closed? and on such a beautiful morning?

I could only make answer to this pertinent query, by observing that the house faced eastward; and the sun might be too strong at that hour.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed Adele, "I feel cold enough; you see, I shiver? For my part, I should open every blind, and admit all the sun I could get. I shall do so, as soon as we get there."

"But la!" continued she, after a pause, "surely they expect us? and by the *Sultana*, too? You would think

some one would be on the look out? They must certainly hear the blowing of our grand boat? And yet no one appears—not even a face at the windows! Come, Ma'mselle Olympe, this is barely kind of you."

Adele endeavoured to disfigure her beautiful countenance with a slight grimace, expressive of chagrin; but the laugh that followed showed how little she was in earnest.

"It may be," interposed Luis, "they are not astir yet: it is early."

"Early, *mon frère*? it is ten o'clock!"

"True, it is that hour," assented Luis, after consulting his watch.

"Besides, where is old Pluto? where Calypse and Chloe? Some of them should be abroad. At least, one of them might have been playing sentinel, I think?"

These were the familiar names of Madame Dardonville's domestics, all known to myself.

"Ah!" exclaimed Adele, a new thought suggesting itself, "I fancy I can explain. Madame and Olympe are gone up to town, that's it. Perhaps she knows that the boat is near: she may have heard it from below, and has driven up to the landing to meet us? Of course Pluto would be with her, and the others are busy in the house. That explains all. So we shall meet her at the landing. Well, that will be charming!"

I gave my assent to this explanation, though far from believing it to be the true one. The deserted appearance of the house was a new element of anxiety to me; and, combined with what I already knew, almost confirmed the terrible suspicion that had shaped itself in my imagination. Though struggling to conceal my real thoughts, it was with difficulty I succeeded in doing so. More than

once my companions regarded me with inquiring looks : as though they observed a singularity in my bearing and behaviour.

With a sense of the keenest anxiety, I looked forward to the moment of our arrival : I did not indulge in much hope that Adele's conjecture would prove correct.

Alas ! it did not. As the boat was warped in, broadside to the wharf, I scanned the crowd with keen glances : not a group—scarcely an individual—escaped my observation. There were no ladies there—no Madame Dardonville, no Olympe ! There were carriages, but not theirs. No private carriages were to be seen, only hackneys waiting for a fare from the boat.

I looked at Adele. There was a slight curl upon her pretty lip—this time really expressive of disappointment and chagrin.

"Perhaps they are up in the town?" I suggested, gently.

"Nay, Monsieur, they should be *here*. It is cruel of Olympe."

"The Madame may have business?"

"*N'importe pas*."

I saw by this that Adele was really offended. Perhaps she had been hearing too many encomiums upon Olympe's beauty. It is not *woman* to like this ; and least to be expected from a woman who is herself a beauty.

Nothing remained but to engage a hackney. This was the work of a moment ; and, as our united luggage was not large, we were soon passing through the streets of St. Louis. The Jehu had received his directions to drive to the Villa Dardonville. He knew the house, and we were soon carried beyond the suburbs in that direction.

We met people on the way. The faces of one or two of them were known to me. As the carriage was an open phaeton, we could all be seen. I observed the eyes of these people turn towards us with a strange expression : a look, as I thought, of astonishment ! Luis appeared more especially to be the object of interest. As we were driving rapidly, however, no one spoke. If they had anything to say, there was no opportunity for them to say it. I do not know whether either of my companions observed this, nor might I have done so ; but for the foreknowledge of which I was possessed.

We at length reached our destination. The phaeton being driven to the front, halted opposite the verandah. No one rushed out to greet us ! no one opened the door !

"C'est drôle !" murmured Adele.

Luis stepped out of the carriage and knocked. A heavy foot was heard inside : some one coming along the hallway ? There was heard the turning of a bolt, and then the rattle of a chain. Strange ! the door has been locked !

It was opened at length, though slowly, and with some degree of caution ; and then a round black face was presented to our view. It was the face of Pluto.

CHAPTER XV.

PLUTO.

THE expression depicted on the countenance of the negro, told us at once that we were not expected. His lips stood apart, his eyes rolled in their sockets, till only the whites

were visible, and he stood with both hands raised aloft in an attitude of astonishment! -

"Why—wy—wy, mass'r Looey! war de dibbil hab you come from?"

"Why, Pluto, where should I have come from, but from home?—from New Orleans?"

"Aw! massr! don't joke dis ole nigga. You know you hadn't time to get down dar; you'd scarce time to get to the mouf ob de 'hio."

"The mouth of the Ohio?"

"Ya, massr! You know de *Belle* didn't start till near night; an' how could you a got dar? Golly, massr! hope dar's nuffin wrong? wha' did you leave missa and Ma'aselle 'Lympe?"

"Where did I leave your mistress and Mademoiselle Olympe! I have not seen either of them, since I last saw you, Pluto."

"O Gorramighty! massr Looey, how you *do* run dis ole nigga, 'case he half blind. Hyaw! hyaw! hyaw!"

"Half crazed, rather, Pluto, I should fancy!"

"Craze, massr? law massr, no. But do tell, Massr Looey, whar be de ma'm an ma'aselle?"

"That is just the question I have to put to you. Where are they?"

"Lor, massr, how can I tell. Didn't I drive you all 'board de boat yes'day noon, and sure massr, I han't seed none ob you since den?"

"Drive us aboard the boat! drive who?"

"Why you, massr, an' Missa Dardonville, and Ma'aselle 'Lympe."

"Of what boat are you speaking?"

"De big boat for Cincinatti—da *Massoury Belle*, dey calls her."

De Hauteroche turned towards me with a look expressive of stupified wonder.

"What!" he gasped out, "what can this fellow mean?"

"Answer me, Pluto," said I, addressing myself to the domestic, "you say you drove your mistress and Mademoiselle to the boat—the *Missouri Belle*?"

"Ya, massr, dat for sarting."

"And did they embark in her?"

"Sarting, massr, I seed um go off afore I leff de waff."

"A gentleman accompanied them?"

"Ob coos, Massr Hoteroche 'companied dem."

"Who said it was M. De Hauteroche?"

"Ebbery body say so; but law, massr, dis chile aint blind. I see Massr Looey ma'seff; an' sure he wa stayin' at de house for more 'n a week. You's only a playin' possum wi' de ole nigga? dat's what you are a doin'."

"Another word, Pluto! Did Madame tell you where she was going?"

"No, massr, not adzactly tell me, but I knows whar, for all dat. Hyaw, hyaw, hyaw!" and the darkie displayed his ivories in a broad grin, while a knowing look was exhibited in the corners of his great eyes.

"Where was it?" I asked, without heeding his ludicrous humour.

"Gorry, massr; p'raps Massr Looey, he no let me tell?" and the black turned an inquisitive look towards De Hauteroche.

"It is just what I desire you to do. For Heaven's sake, man, do not delay! This is most mysterious."

"Berry queer! Well, Massr Looey, since you's no objection, I tell dis gemman and Missy Adele; but I thort dey know'd all 'bout it a'ready. Ob coorse we brak folk

only knows what we've heerd. It may be true, an' it mayent, for all dat."

"Out with it, man!"

"Well, de folks all say dat Ma'aselle 'Lympe she go be marry to young Massr Looey; and dat dey all go de way to France to have de knot tied—all de way to France! hyaw! hyaw!"

"To France?"

"Yes, massr. De say young massr—hyaw—he have rich uncle dar—he die—he leave all to Massr Looey—hope him true Massr Looey—dat young massr he go to get de money, and den he marry Ma'aselle 'Lympe, and den dey all come back hyar."

"And who has said all this?"

"Law, massr, ebbery body know 'im—ebbery body say so. 'Sides, I hear Massr Gardette, de banker, tell one gemman, day I drove massr to de bank. Golly, de big cheque missa did draw out dat berry day! She say 'twar for trabbelin 'spenses. Dar wa dollars 'nuf to a trabbled em all ober de world. But say, Massr Looey, why hab you come back? Sure missa an' Ma'aselle 'Lympe are safe? Hope dar's nuffin wrong, massr?"

De Hauteroche appeared stupified with amazement—absolutely petrified. Pluto might as well have addressed his inquiries to a stone.

To question the negro further would have been idle. Indeed, I was already in possession of sufficient data to determine the outlines of this mysterious affair—if not to make known the whole of its details. I was now convinced that a horrid crime was being committed—a base deception practised—of which Madame Dardonville and her daughter were the dupes and victims. In all likelihood, some one was personating Luis De Hauteroche;

and, under this guise—and by some pretence about a legacy, as report declared—had induced Madame Dardenville to leave her home and make a journey to France! This part of the story might be true or not; but certain it was that the ladies had gone away in the company of some one who was personating Luis de Hauteroche. Whither they were gone, and with what intent, I could not determine; but I had little doubt as to who was their companion and betrayer: it was the *sportsman*, Despard.

I did not communicate my thoughts to either of my companions. I could see no object in doing so. Their hour of misery would arrive soon enough. I thought it better they should suffer an hour of mystery.

I knew that M. Gardette was a friend of Madame Dardenville—a family friend, as such men are termed. It was probable, therefore, he could throw light on the matter. He had cashed a large cheque, it appeared, and must know something of the object for which it was drawn. Moreover, the affair of the lost bill of exchange was to be inquired after. Both objects could be accomplished at the same time.

I proposed, therefore, that we should at once proceed to the banking-house of M. Gardette. My companions, overcome with astonishment, yielded unresistingly to my proposal, and, giving the Jehu the necessary orders, we were driven back in the direction of the city.

Half an hour brought us to the banking-house, where the horses were pulled up. Adele sat in the carriage and her brother, acting under my advice, remained with her. I thought it better I should see M. Gardette alone. Not yet had the time arrived, when it was necessary Dr Hauteroche should know the full extent of his loss.

CHAPTER XVI.

M. GARDETTE.

I HAD the good fortune to find M. Gardette in his counting-house. He knew me ; and our interview proceeded without embarrassment.

I shall not weary my reader with the conversation that passed between us ; nor yet detail all the circumstances that came to my knowledge during that interview. Suffice it to give only those more immediately connected with the thread of my narrative ; and which of themselves were sufficient to confirm my most fearful suspicion.

Some one like De Hauteroche—resembling him almost as a counterpart—had assumed his name ; had deceived Madame Dardonville as to the identity ; and by an influence, as yet only guessed at, had persuaded herself and daughter to take the extraordinary step of accompanying him to Europe !

All this might easily have been effected. There was no improbability in it, when it is remembered that it was some years since De Hauteroche had been seen either by mother or daughter.

Another circumstance, which I now recollected, strengthened the probability of their having gone on this journey. I remembered Madame Dardonville having told me that she contemplated a journey to Europe, at some not distant period—that she was desirous of visiting the home of her youth, and renewing some ancient friendships. Moreover, she had stated her intention of residing some time in Paris, in order that in the world's fashionable metropolis, she might obtain for her daughter the finishing touch of a polite education.

This was but an ambition common to most transatlantic *émigrés*, especially, as in the case of the widow of Dardonville, where pecuniary considerations offered no obstacle. It was not improbable, therefore, that she had carried, or was about to carry, this design into execution.

All that seemed singular was the hasty manner in which she had undertaken the journey : for in her letters to New Orleans she had not said a word of such intention. It was easy to conceive, however, that the counterfeit De Hauteroche, acting with the influence which the real De Hauteroche possessed, might, without much difficulty, have thus brought about the event.

In reality, it was no longer a conjecture, but a *fait accompli*. He had done it ; and Madame Dardonville and her daughter, in the company of an accomplished brigand, were now on their way to Europe. Of the truth of this, the facts stated by the banker were sufficient proof. M. Gardette was aware of my friendly relations with the family, and without reserve he communicated all he knew. His knowledge was not much, and related chiefly to matters of business. Of course, like other friends of the family, he had heard the rumours that were afloat ; and in his business capacity he was made aware of the intended trip to Europe. A circular letter for a large amount (10,000 dollars), made payable in Paris, besides a small cheque for present purposes, had naturally made him aware that some grand manœuvre was going on, and that Paris was to be the *but* of a journey. Further than this, he had not been intrusted with the confidence of the family. All else he had drawn from rumours, which were current in the place. It would not be easy for a lady, so conspicuous as the rich widow Dardonville, to keep even family secrets concealed. Rumour could not be cheated of her tales ; and that

which was generally believed in this instance, appeared to be the correct one.

The banker had heard of the projected marriage of Olympe ; that young De Hauteroche was to be the son-in-law ; and, indeed, some of the peculiar conditions of M. Dardonville's will were not unknown to him. Administrators will let secrets slip out, and bankers have peculiar opportunities of becoming possessed of them.

M. Gardette had heard other particulars—that young De Hauteroche had been on a visit to the villa Dardonville for more than a week : of this fact he was quite certain, and no doubt it accounted for him, M. Gardette, not receiving an answer to a communication he had addressed to that gentleman in New Orleans.

I knew well enough to what communication he referred ; and I soon convinced him that it did not account for his not receiving the answer.

All these particulars M. Gardette imparted to me, without any suspicion of the real state of the case ; and, when I told him that M. De Hauteroche had not been on a visit to the Villa Dardonville, he firmly, but politely, contradicted the assertion !

“Pardon me, Monsieur ! I know several who have seen him here, though not in town, for, what was considered strange, he has never made his appearance in our streets during the whole of his stay. It is not so strange, either,” proceeded the banker, with a bland smile. “At such a crisis men care but little for general society. Perhaps,” added the old gentleman, with a knowing look, “he will go more abroad by-and-bye. A lucky young man—a splendid fortune, sir !”

“An unhappy young man, Monsieur Gardette. A sad fortune, I fear—more truly, a terrible misfortune !”

"Why, Monsieur? what mean you?"

"That the person who was on a visit to the Villa Dardenville was not M. De Hauteroche; but, as I have reason to believe, a noted *sportsman*, or rather swindler, who is personating him. M. De Hauteroche has just arrived with me in the *Sultana*. We came direct from New Orleans: out of which city M. De Hauteroche has not been for months past."

Had a bomb-shell dropped into the counting-house of M. Gardette, it could not have startled him more effectually. He leaped from his chair, exclaiming:

"*Sacré Dieu!* Monsieur—you are jesting?"

"Alas! no. Look through the window, M. Gardette—that is Luis De Hauteroche."

The carriage was directly under the window; and Luis and Adele, seated in it, were visible through the half-open venetian

"Certainly! it is he and his sister! I know them both—pretty children! I knew the old Colonel well. *Mon Dieu!* Monsieur—is what you tell me true?"

"My friends will confirm it!"

"*Pardieu!* I fear it needs no confirmation. Ah! now I comprehend—no answer—the thousand dollar bill—this accounts for it—his staying so closely by the villa—friends not received there—the number of cheques drawn!—*Mon Dieu!* Madame Dardenville is lost—we are all lost!"

"Let us hope not yet. It may still be possible to intercept this villanous adventurer, and frustrate his scheme of infamy?"

"Possible, Monsieur!—no, no—impossible! I can think of no means—how would you act?"

"Follow them, of course?"

"Ah! Monsieur, it is easy to say follow them. The boat

left yesterday. She is a fast boat ; she is the mail-packet. There is no other for Cincinatti—not one for a week.”

“Are you certain of that ?”

“Quite certain—here is the list.”

The banker pointed to the printed table, that exhibited the days of sailing of the different steam-boats. I had not patience to examine it. His assertion was sufficient to satisfy me : for he had himself a stake in the pursuit—enough to give him an interest in its success.

His information filled me with chagrin. All along I had been planning a mode of procedure ; and I could think of no other, than that of immediately following Despard and his innocent victims. I had calculated on their being detained at Cincinatti : for I had ascertained that the *Missouri Belle* ran no farther. It was not hopeless, therefore, had there been another boat on that day, or the following, or even the third day ; but a week, that would never do. The travellers would easily obtain passage beyond Cincinatti ; the more easily as it was now the season of high water. They would reach Pittsburg or Wheeling ; and from either of these cities the communication with the Atlantic seaboard was constant and daily. In New York lay the Cunard steamer. Her days of sailing were fixed and certain ; but at that moment my mind was in such a turmoil, that I could not calculate with any degree of exactitude, our prospects of reaching her in time. That must be left to a later period.

In spite of the confusion of the moment, an idea had come to my aid : Cincinatti might be reached by horse.

I rapidly communicated this thought to the banker, who, to my satisfaction, did not disapprove of it. It was a long ride, over three hundred miles, the roads heavy ; it would cost much horseflesh, suggested the man of money :

but the circumstances required that some desperate plan must be had recourse to.

De Hauteroche and I could take horse, and ride day and night. Adele could remain at St. Luis. No matter at what cost we travelled, it was the only course to be followed. No other offered a feasible hope.

It was a fortunate circumstance, that just before leaving New Orleans I had had my exchequer replenished ; and there would be no obstacle in finding means. The worthy banker, moreover, threw out a hint that he would not hang back ; and, furthermore, offered to become the guardian of Adele during our absence. I knew that this would be agreeable both to De Hauteroche and his sister.

All these matters were arranged without communicating with our friends outside. I felt certain that it was the course of action De Hauteroche would take, and I was but preparing the way. It cost only a few minutes to sketch out the programme.

Though suffering under the disappointment occasioned by Madame Dardonville's unexpected absence, and tortured by the mystery of it, my friends were not yet fully awake to its fearful import. It was no longer possible to keep from them the afflicting news. In another minute, and in the privacy of the banker's counting-house, they were made acquainted with all. I need not describe the surprise, the grief, the agony, of both—the furious paroxysm of passion into which Luis was thrown.

The necessity of action, however, at length produced calmness. There was no time to be wasted in idle emotions, and De Hauteroche, entering at once into the design already sketched out, we speedily prepared ourselves to carry it into execution. Adele offered no objection. She saw the necessity of this painful parting—at once from

brother and lover—and she only prayed that we might succeed in the end.

Before the sun had passed his meridian, De Hauteroche and I, mounted on the two toughest steeds the stables of St. Louis could produce, rode off for the ferry wharf. There, crossing the broad river, we entered the territory of Illinois; and, without pausing a moment, we started forward upon the road that conducts to the distant city of Cincinatti.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PURSUIT.

BUT few words passed between myself and my companion for the first ten miles along the road. He was absorbed in profound melancholy, while I was busied in making certain calculations. We travelled as fast as was safe for our horses; though far more rapidly than these were accustomed to go. Wherever the road would admit of it, our pace was a gallop; at other times a gentle canter, or an ambling gait, known throughout the Mississippian States as "pacing." This, where horses have been trained to it (and most western horses have), is one of the fastest and most convenient gaits for travellers to adopt. Both horse and horseman are less fatigued by it than by either the trot or gallop; and the speed attained is almost as good as by either.

I had some difficulty in restraining my companion. Still labouring under the excitement produced by the painful discovery, he would have galloped on at top speed, till his horse had broken down under him. I knew that this would be the greatest of misfortunes; and that, if we had

any chance of reaching Cincinnati as soon as the steamer, an incident of this kind would be certain to destroy it. Should either of our horses give up, from being over-ridden, much time might be lost before we could replace them; and this, perhaps, might occur miles from any town—miles from any stable where it was possible to obtain a remount. Our only hope, therefore, lay in carefully guarding against such a *contretemps*; and economizing the strength of our animals, as far as the necessary rate of speed would allow us.

Of course we had no idea of riding the same horses all the way. That would have been impossible—at all events within the time allowed us for the journey. It was our intention to take the St. Louis horses some sixty miles or so, in fact, to such place as we might obtain a relay, thence to proceed upon fresh ones, sixty or seventy miles further; and so on till we had reached our destination. This sort of journeying would require a liberal outlay; but of that we were not in the mind to care much. The object upon which we were bent rendered such considerations of inferior importance.

I have said that I was engaged in certain calculations. They were rather conjectures as to the probability of our success, though they partook also of the character of the former. Some of my data were exact enough. Others depended only on contingencies, that might or might not turn in our favour. Of one thing, however, I was able to assure both myself and my companion; and that was, that there was still a possibility of our overtaking the adventurer, and if fortune favoured us, a probability of it. I need hardly say how joyed was De Hauteroche by the assurance. Of course it was but my opinion; and I had only arrived at it, after a process of reasoning in which I

had examined the case in all its bearings. Before starting off from St. Louis, we had not allowed time for this. In the confused haste of preparation, we thought only of entering upon the pursuit; and had started blindly forward, without even calculating the chances of success. It would be time enough to think of these upon the road: at all events, it was not before we were fairly on the road, that we found time to talk of them.

One of the data, upon which I relied, was that incidentally furnished me by the pilot of the *Sultana*. He had stated, during our short conversation, that the *Missouri Belle* would reach Cincinnati in less than four days—in all about four days from the time she had taken her departure from St. Louis. M. Gardette had confirmed this statement: it agreed with his own information. About four days was the usual time in making such a journey. The boat had the start of us about three quarters of a day. True she had a longer route to go—by more than a hundred miles—but then her progress would be continuous, night and day, at a speed of at least ten miles an hour; while we must rest and sleep. Could we have ridden three days and nights without stopping, we might have headed her. This, however, was a physical impossibility, or nearly akin to it. I believe my companion would have attempted it, had I not restrained him. I had still hoped that we might arrive in time; and, by making one hundred miles a day, we might calculate on so doing. Three days would thus bring us to Cincinnati; and I knew that the steamer could not arrive before.

It proved a long, hard ride; and, I need scarcely add, that it was not a merry one. It required all my efforts to cheer my companion, who sometimes sank into the most profound melancholy—varied at intervals by a passionate



IT PROVED A LONG, HARD RIDE.

outburst of anger, as he reflected upon the villanous outrage, of which himself and those he held dearest had been made the victims. There was still hope, however; and that had its effect in restoring his spirits to an occasional calmness.

It was a long, weary ride; and occupied the greater part of both night and day. Many a poor steed was left along our route, with just strength to return to his stable. We scarcely took rest or sleep; but, saddling fresh horses, we pressed on. The road seemed interminable, notwithstanding the rate at which we travelled; and many miles of it we passed over, asleep in our saddles!

Our journey ended at length; but notwithstanding all our exertions, we had not made good our programme. It was the fourth day when we caught sight of the spires of Cincinnati—near the evening. No more weary eyes than ours ever looked upon the walls of a city. But the prospect of success awakened us to fresh energy; and we rode briskly onward and entered the streets.

The "Henry House" was upon our way, and it was the only hotel—at least, the one where such a party would be certain to stop. We halted and made inquiries. They had not been there: though other passengers by the *Missouri Belle* were in the house. The boat, then, had arrived!

We were preparing to hasten on board; but it was not necessary.

"Strangers," said the hotel keeper, pointing to a gentleman who stood near, "if you wish to inquire about any passengers by the *Missouri Belle*, that is the captain himself."

"Yes," freely answered the latter, in reply to our inquiries, "two ladies and a gentleman—Madame Dardon-

ville, of St. Louis—I know the lady—and her daughter. The gentleman I do not know—a young lawyer from New Orleans, I believe.”

“At what hotel have they stopped?”

“Not at any. A Wheeling boat was just going out as we came to the landing; they went by her. They were going East.”

De Hauteroche and I slipped out of our saddles, and walked, or rather trotted into the hotel. The intelligence was terrible, and for the moment unmanned us both. Fortune appeared to be on the side of villany.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DENOUEMENT.

REFRESHED by a draught of wine, I proceeded to prosecute our inquiry. I had not yet lost hope; and with this I succeeded also in cheering my friend. The day was Sunday; and I knew that the Saturday following was the sailing day of the Atlantic steamer. There was then only the Cunard line; and only one steamer every fortnight. Both day and hour were fixed—each alternate Saturday at 12 m.—punctual as the Horse Guards’ clock. At both termini of her long ocean-journey was this punctuality observed; and I knew that a gun proclaimed the exact meridional hour of her departure. To reach New York, then, by 12 o’clock on Saturday, was the object to be aimed at. Was it possible of accomplishment?

Inquiry led me to believe that it was; and hope once more supplanted despair in the bosom of De Hauteroche.

Everything depended upon when we could get a boat

to Wheeling: since beyond that the journey would be by stage-coach and rail; and these had fixed and certain arrangements.

When could we start for Wheeling? No one at the hotel could answer this question; and, without loss of time, we proceeded to seek our information at the wharf or landing.

None that day, of course. It was Sunday, and we did not expect it; but we ascertained that a small boat—a very indifferent looking craft—purposed starting for Pittsburg on the morrow. Of course a Pittsburg boat would serve equally well for Wheeling. The hour promised was twelve; and, without further hesitation, we engaged passage.

We needed the refreshment of a hotel; and, having paid our fare, we returned to the Henry House.

Here we were put in possession of a piece of intelligence, unexpected as it was unpleasant. It was to the effect that we need not calculate getting off on the morrow—that there was not the slightest prospect of such a thing; that the captain of the little boat—the *Buckeye*, she was called—was well known to take several days in starting. We might congratulate ourselves if we were off by Wednesday!

There was an air of probability in all this; and our informants had no motive for deceiving us. Certainly it would have given us great uneasiness—in fact, have destroyed our last hope—had it not been for an idea that entered my head at that moment, and promised to get us clear of such a sad dilemma. I had observed, while aboard, that the *Buckeye* was a very humble trader—that the money she received, on account of either freight or passengers during a single trip, could not be a very large

amount; and that a *douceur* of 100 dollars would no doubt fix her hour of sailing—as punctually as the *Cunard* steamer herself.

I communicated my opinion to my friend. He was exactly of the same way of thinking.

The thing was easily arranged. It cost us a second visit to the *Buckeye*; and, before we retired for the night, we felt quite easy in our minds that the little steamer would take us off at the appointed hour.

And she did: having steamed off from the landing on the stroke of 12 m., to the astonishment of all Cincinatti!

Wheeling was reached; and then jolting by stage over the cold mountains to Cumberland, we continued on by rail to Baltimore. Thence without delay to the drab city of Philadelphia; and onward to the metropolis of America. We made no inquiries by the way; we did not stop, except for the hours of the different trains: we had but one object in view—to reach New York by 12 m. on Saturday.

It was Saturday morning when we left Philadelphia. We were in the very train designed to reach New York in time—the express—arranged for the sailing of the European steamer. Thank Heaven, we should be in time!

The Fates once more turned against us. Some accident to the engine, occurring near Trenton, delayed us for half an hour; but this being righted, we pressed forward with accelerated speed.

Many a watch was regarded with anxious eyes—for there were many in the train who proposed crossing the Atlantic—but who can tell the agony experienced at this moment by Luis de Hauteroche? I was myself too troubled to speak.

The feeling at length reached its culminating point. The city of New Jersey was in sight: there lay the *Cunard* steamer at her moorings!

No, she is moving out! See! she has dropped into mid stream! Behold that white puff of smoke! Hark! 'tis the signal gun! She is gone—gone!

No boat may overtake her now—the swiftest would be launched in vain. She will delay for no one—not even for Prince or President. She is the *Cunard* packet. Her laws are immutable—fixed—inexorable. O God! she is gone!

My friend's distress exhibited itself in a frantic manner; but there were others, suffering from far less disappointment, who made equal show of their chagrin. This had the effect of drawing away from us that notice we might otherwise have attracted.

Silent and melancholy we both stood upon the now deserted wharf—gazing upon the black hull, that every minute was growing a more insignificant object to the sight. I shall not attempt to depict the feelings of my companion: I could scarcely analyse my own.

We were turning coldly away to seek some hotel; we had even advanced some paces from the landing, when a singular cry, followed by a confused murmur of voices, as of men in dispute, caused us to look back.

A small knot of sea-faring men stood on a projection of the wharf: they appeared to be employés of the Steam Company; who, after performing the duty of getting the vessel afloat, had lingered to see her out of the bay. One of the men held a telescope levelled to his eye, and directed down the bay: as if following the movements of the steamer. We listened to hear what the men were saying.

"Yes!" exclaimed the man with the telescope, "I told you so—something wrong yonder."

"Give me the glass, old fellow!" demanded one of his comrades—a rough-looking sailor.

"Yes, give it to Brace, Bill—he's got a long sight."

The man surrendered the glass, as requested; and Brace, placing it to his eye, looked silently and steadily through it. I could have heard my companion's heart beating, had it not been for the thumping of my own. How eagerly we waited for the words of Brace! They came at length—words of gold!

"Ye be right, Bill—there ur somethin' wrong—there's a paddle broke—I sees 'em on the wheel-house—yes, that's it."

"They'll put back again!" suggested one.

"Sartin to do," drawled Brace, "they are putting back—they're getting the cripple round now as fast as she can come. Now she comes this way. Make ready your ropes, boys—more grog, and plenty o' keelhaulin'!"

The reaction of feeling produced by these words, in the minds of my companion and myself, cannot be described; and it was sustained by the evidence of our own eyes—for, the moment after, we could make out that it was the steamer's head that was towards us, and that she was slowly but certainly making up the bay—back to the landing from which she had just taken her departure.

There was something almost astounding in this occurrence. It seemed as if Providence itself had a hand in the event.

We did not allow our excited feelings to hinder us from taking some cautionary steps necessary to the carrying out of our design. There was time enough for us to reach the

office of the nearest justice, and arm ourselves with the authority for an arrest; and, before the steamer had reached the wharf, we were on the spot with two plain-clothes policemen, anxious for action. They scented large game, and consequently a rich reward.

They had soon an opportunity of earning it; for, in a few minutes after, we were aboard, and M. Jacques Despard was in handcuffs!

I was glad that we alighted upon him alone—as it saved a painful scene. The ladies were in their state-room; and knew nothing of the arrest, till after their travelling companion had been carried over the side of the ship!

There was a scene notwithstanding—a scene of surprise and confusion; but explanations followed fast; and the scene ended by all who took part in it becoming imbued with one common feeling—that sense of supreme joy, which one experiences who has just narrowly escaped from some terrible danger.

As yet no injury had accrued. How near all had been to utter ruin!

* * * *

Of course the passage money was freely forfeited to Messrs. Cunard Co.; and the family luggage transferred from the steamer to a Broadway hotel.

After a short stay there, another steamer that plies between New York and New Orleans, carried us directly to the latter city—where M. Gardette was good enough to meet us, and deliver up his temporary ward.

Long ere this we had learnt the details of the Despard infamy. They differed, in no essential particular, from what conjecture had suggested to us.

It appeared that it was not the first time Despard had personated young De Hauteroche, to his own advantage,

and the latter's disgrace. He was well aware of the remarkable likeness between them ; and with this, as an aid to his swindling designs, he acted with a certainty of success. He had taken pains to possess himself of such points in the family history as were accessible to his inquiries ; and it was while prosecuting this branch of his *industrie*, that the letters had fallen into his hands. Of the use he made of them we know most of the details. As already conjectured, he had started for St. Louis, on gaining possession of the will and the letter which accompanied it ; and, as neither Madame Dardonville nor Olympe had seen Luis de Hauteroche for a considerable period of time, the deception was easy enough. The voyage to France was a deep laid scheme ; and the circular letter for 10,000 dollars on a Paris Bank was a bold stroke of swindling. Once there, the villain expected to be the recipient of that money. The plea for the journey was not without plausibility. The St. Louis rumour was correct : a dead uncle's property left to the De Hauteroches—a legacy that required to be claimed immediately. Another inducement : his sister Adele and the young Englishman were to meet him there—in Paris. The Englishman was married to Adele, and preferred returning to Europe by the West India steamer ! Such had been his story.

The hasty marriage somewhat surprised Madame Dardonville, as well as the design of the European convention. She regarded it as somewhat eccentric ; but Luis De Hauteroche was to her, nearest and dearest, and how could she refuse compliance with his proposal ? In fine, she made her arrangements, and set forth.

Nothing had been said of the marriage between Luis and Olympe. That was tacitly left for future arrangement. Paris would be the place—if it should ever come off.

It was doubtful, however, whether it ever would have taken place—even if the steamer had held on her way. Both Madame Dardonville and her daughter had conceived strange imaginings about the projected son-in-law. Something had occurred every day—almost every hour—to excite surprise—even a little *dégoût*. Luis De Hauteroche had much changed—for the worse—had become dissipated, vulgarized—in short, anything but what should have been expected in the son of his father. It was a disappointment—a chagrin.

Poor Luis! Had the steamer gone on, he might have lost part of the fortune, but he was in little danger of losing his wife. Olympe would undoubtedly have forfeited the legacy rather than have yielded herself up to the vulgar counterfeit.

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I saw Despard once afterwards—while on a visit to the Louisiana State Prison at Bayou Sara. With his little pile of picked cotton before him, he looked a sorry enough sort of wretch—far different from the ruffled *élégant* of other days. The forgery had been proved home, and entitled him to his present residence for a lease of not less than ten years!

How very different appeared his counterpart when I last saw him, elegantly attired, living in an elegant mansion with elegant furniture, and waited on by a troop of willing domestics!

And she who gave him all this was by his side—his blooming bride—the lovely Olympe.

A CASE OF RETALIATION.

THE first action fought by the American army in the valley of Mexico, on 20th August, 1847, was at Contreras. It was an attack upon a fortified camp, in which lay General Valencia with 6000 Mexicans, composed of the remnant of the army beaten by Taylor, on the hills of Bueno Vista. It was styled "The Army of the North;" most of the soldiers composing it being from the northern departments—the hardy miners of Zacatecas and San Luis Potosi,—and they were esteemed "the flower" of the Mexican army.

On the previous day powder enough was burned to have cured the atmosphere for twenty miles around; yet there was nothing done. We held the ground, however, in mud up to our ankles. In this we lay shivering under a cold drizzle until the morning.

By daylight we were at it in earnest. During the night two of our best brigades had crept, unperceived, through the clay "barrancas" close up to the rear of the enemy's camp, ready to spring.

At daybreak old Riley shouted, "Forward and give them h—ll!" and before our foes—not expecting us from

that quarter—could bring their artillery to bear upon us, we were in the midst of them.

The action lasted just seventeen minutes. At the end of that time we had laid our hands upon thirty of Valencia's cannon, and taken about a thousand prisoners ; and had, moreover, the satisfaction of seeing the rest of them, in their long yellow mantles, disappearing through the fissures of the lava fields, in rapid flight along the road to Mexico.

We followed, of course, but as our cavalry had not been able to cross the Pedregal, and as the enemy were our superiors in retreat, we were soon distanced. As we came down upon the village of San Angel, the occasional blast of a light infantry bugle, with the "crack—crack—cr-r-r-ack" of our rifles in front, told us that we had still some more work to do before entering the halls of the Montezumas. We were, in fact, driving in the light troops of Santa Anna's main army, lying we knew not where, but somewhere between us and the far famed city.

It is not my intention to give an account of the battle that followed ; nor should I have entered into these details of the fight at Contreras, were it not to put the reader in possession of "situations," and, moreover, to bring to his notice an incident that occurred, during that action, to a friend—the hero of this narrative—whom I will now introduce. I was at the time a Sub., and my friend, Richard L——, was the Captain of my company ; young as myself, and fully as ardent in pursuit of the red glory of war. We had long known each other, had gone through the campaign together, and, more than once, had stood side by side under the leaden "hail." I need not say how a juxtaposition of this kind strengthens the ties of friendship.

We had come out of Resaca and Monterey, unscathed.

We had passed through Cerro Gordo with "only a scratch." So far we had been fortunate, as I esteemed it.

Not so my friend ; he wished to get a wound for the honour of the thing. He was accommodated at Contreras ; for the bullet from an escopette had passed through his left arm below the elbow-joint. It appeared to be only a flesh wound ; and as his sword-arm was still safe, he disdained to leave the field until the "day was done." Binding the wounded limb with a rag from his shirt, and slinging it in his sash, he headed his company in the pursuit. By ten o'clock we had driven the enemy's skirmishers out of San Angel, and had taken possession of the village. Our Commander-in-Chief was as yet ignorant of the position of the Mexican army ; and we halted, to await the necessary reconnaissance.

Notwithstanding the cold of the preceding night, the day had become hot and oppressive. The soldiers, wearied with watching, marching, and the fight, threw themselves down in the dusty streets. Hunger kept many awake, for they had eaten nothing for twenty hours. A few houses were entered, and the *tortillas* and *tasajo* were drawn forth ; but there is very little to be found, at any time, in the larder of a Mexican house ; and the gaol-like doors of most of them were closely barred. The unglazed windows were open ; but the massive iron railings of the "reja" defended them from intrusion. From these railings various flags were suspended—French, German, Spanish, and Portuguese—signifying that the inmates were foreigners in the country, and therefore entitled to respect. Where no excuse for such claim existed, a white banner, the emblem of peace, protruded through the bars ; and perhaps this was as much respected as the symbols of neutrality.

It was the season when fashion deserts the Alameda of

Mexico, and betakes itself to *montè*, cock-fighting, and intriguing, in the romantic pueblos that stud the valley. San Angel is one of these pueblos, and at that moment many of the principal families of the city were domiciled around us. Through the rejas we could catch an occasional glimpse of the occupiers of the dark apartments within.

It is said that, with woman, curiosity is stronger than fear. It appeared to be so in this case. When the inhabitants saw that pillage was not intended, beautiful and stylish women showed themselves in the windows and on the balconies, looking down at us with a timorous yet confiding wonder. This was strange, after the stories of our barbarity, in which they had been so well drilled; but we had become accustomed to the high courage of the Mexican females, and it was a saying amongst us, that "the women were the best men in the country." Jestings aside, I am satisfied, that had they taken up arms instead of their puny countrymen, we should not have boasted so many easy victories.

Our bivouack lasted about an hour. The reconnaissance having been at length completed, the enemy was discovered in a fortified position around the convent and bridge of Churubusco. Twigg's division was ordered forward to commence the attack, just as the distant booming of cannon across the lava fields, told us that our right wing, under Worth, had sprung the enemy's left, at the hacienda of San Antonio, and was driving it along the great national road. Both wings of our army were beautifully converging to a common focus—the pueblo of Churubusco. The brigade to which I was attached, still held the position where it had halted in San Angel. We were to move down to the support of Twigg's division, as soon as the latter should

get fairly engaged. Our place in the line had thrown us in front of a house somewhat retired from the rest, single storied, and, like most of the others, flat roofed, with a low parapet around the top. A large door and two windows fronted the street. One of the windows was open, and knotted to the *reja* was a small white handkerchief, embroidered along the borders and fringed with fine lace. There was something so delicate, yet striking, in the appeal, that it at once attracted the attention of L—— and myself. It would have touched the compassion of a Cossack ; and we felt at the moment that we would have protected that house against a general's order to pillage.

We had seated ourselves on the edge of the *banquette*, directly in front of the window. A bottle of wine, by some accident, had reached us ; and as we quaffed its contents, our eyes constantly wandered upon the open *reja*. We could see no one. All was dark within ; but we could not help thinking that the owner of the kerchief—she who had hurriedly displayed that simple emblem of truce—could not be otherwise than an interesting and lovely creature.

At length the drums beat for Twigg's division to move forward, and, attracted by the noise, a grey-haired old man appeared at the window. With feelings of disappointment, my friend and I turned our glances upon the street, and for some moments watched the horse artillery as it swept past. When our gaze was again directed to the house, the old man had a companion—the object of our instinctive expectation ; yet fairer even than our imagination had portrayed.

The features indicated that she was a Mexican, but the complexion was darker than the half-breed ; the Aztec blood predominated. The crimson mantling under the

bronze of her cheeks, gave to her countenance that picture-like expression of the mixed races of the western world. The eye, black, with long fringing lash, and a brow upon which the jetty crescent seemed to have been painted. The nose slightly aquiline, curving at the nostril; while luxuriant hair, in broad plaits, fell far below her waist. As she stood on the sill of the low window, we had a full view of her person—from the satin slipper to the *reboso* that hung loosely over her forehead. She was plainly dressed in the style of her country. We saw that she was not of the aristocracy, for, even in this remote region, has Paris fashioned the costume of that order. On the other hand, she was above the class of the “poblanas,” the demoiselles of the showy “naguas” and naked ankles. She was of the middle rank. For some moments my friend and myself gazed in silent wonder upon the fair apparition.

She stood awhile, looking out upon the street, scanning the strange uniforms that were grouped before her. At length her eye fell upon us; and as she perceived that my comrade was wounded, she turned towards the old man.

“Look, father, a wounded officer! ah, what a sad thing, poor officer.”

“Yes, it is a captain, shot through the arm.”

“Poor fellow! he is pale—he is weary. I shall give him sweet water; shall I, father?”

“Very well, go, bring it.”

The girl disappeared from the window; and in a few moments she returned with a glass, containing an amber-coloured liquid—the essence of the pine-apple. Making a sign towards L——, the little hand that held the glass was thrust through the bars of the reja

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rose, and taking the glass, I handed it to my friend. L—— bowed to the window, and acknowledging his gratitude in the best Spanish he could muster, he drank off the contents. The glass was then returned ; and the young girl took her station as before.

We did not enter into conversation,—neither L—— nor myself ; but I noticed that the incident had made an impression upon my friend. On the other hand, I observed the eyes of the girl, although at intervals wandering away, always return, and rest upon the features of my comrade. L—— was handsome ; besides, he bore upon his person the evidence of a higher quality—courage ; the quality that, before all others, will win the heart of a woman.

All at once, the features of the girl changed their expression, and she uttered a scream. Turning towards my friend, I saw the blood dripping through the sash. His wound had reopened.

I threw my arms around him, as several of the soldiers rushed forward ; but before we could remove the bandage L—— had swooned.

“May I beseech you to open the door?” said I, addressing the young girl and her father.

“*Si-si, Señor,*” cried they together, hurrying away from the window.

At that moment the rattle of musketry from Coyoacan, and the roar of field artillery, told us that Twigg was engaged. The long roll echoed through the streets, and the soldiers were speedily under arms.

I could stay no longer, for I had now to lead the company ; so leaving L—— in charge of two of the men, I placed myself at its head. As the “Forward” was given, I heard the great door swing upon its hinges ; and looking back as we marched down the street, I saw my friend

conducted into the house. I had no fears for his safety, as a regiment was to remain in the village. . . . In ten minutes more I was upon the field of battle, and a red field it was. Of my own small detachment every second soldier "bit the dust" on the plain of Portales. I escaped unhurt, though my regiment was well peppered by our own artillerists from the *tête du pont* of Churubusco. In two hours we drove the enemy through the *garita* of San Antonio de Abad. It was a total rout; and we could have entered the city without firing another shot. We halted, however, before the gates—a fatal halt, that afterwards cost us nearly 2,000 men, the flower of our little army. But, as I before observed, I am not writing a history of the campaign.

An armistice followed, and gathering our wounded from the fields around Churubusco, the army retired into the villages. The four divisions occupied respectively the pueblos of Tacubaya, San Angel, Mixcoac, and San Augustin de les Cuevas. San Angel was our destination; and the day after the battle my brigade marched back, and established itself in the village.

I was not long in repairing to the house where I had left my friend. I found him suffering from fever—burning fever. In another day he was delirious; and in a week he had lost his arm; but the fever left him, and he began to recover. During the fortnight that followed, I made frequent visits; but a far more tender solicitude watched over him. Rafaela was by his couch; and the old man—her father—appeared to take a deep interest in his recovery. These, with the servants, were the only inmates of the house.

The treacherous enemy having broken the armistice, the burning of the Palace-castle of Chapultepec followed

soon after. Had we failed in the attempt, not one of us would ever have gone out from the valley of Mexico. But we took the castle, and our crippled forces entered the captured city of the Montezumas, and planted their banners upon the National Palace. I was not among those who marched in. Three days afterwards I was carried in upon a stretcher, with a bullet-hole through my thigh, that kept me within doors for a period of three months.

During my invalid hours, L—— was my frequent visitor; he had completely recovered his health, but I noticed that a change had come over him, and his former gaiety was gone.

Fresh troops arrived in Mexico, and to make room, our regiment, hitherto occupying a garrison in the city, was ordered out to its old quarters at San Angel. This was welcome news for my friend, who would now be near the object of his thoughts. For my own part, although once more on my limbs, I did not desire to return to duty in that quarter; and on various pretexts, I was enabled to lengthen out my leave until the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Once only I visited St. Angel. As I entered the house where L—— lived, I found him seated in the open *patio*, under the shade of the orange trees. Rafaela was beside him, and his only hand was held in both of hers. There was no surprise on the part of either, though I was welcomed cordially by both—by her, as being the friend of the man she loved. Yes, she loved him.

“See,” cried L——, rising, and referring to the situation in which I had found them. “All this, my dear H——, in spite of my misfortunes!” and he glanced

significantly at his armless sleeve. "Who would not love her?"

The treaty of Guadalupe was at length concluded, and we had orders to prepare for the route homeward. The next day I received a visit from L——.

"Henry," said he, "I am in a dilemma."

"Well, Major," I replied, for L—— as well as myself had gained a "step"—"what is it?"

"You know I am in love, and you know with whom. What am I to do with her?"

"Why, marry her, of course. What else?"

"I dare not."

"Dare not!"

"That is—not now."

"Why not? Resign your commission, and remain here. You know our regiment is to be disbanded; you cannot do better."

"Ah! my dear fellow, that is not the thing that hinders me."

"What then?"

"Should I marry her, and remain, our lives would not be safe one moment after the army had marched. Papers containing threats and ribald jests have, from time to time, been thrust under the door of her house—to the effect that, should she marry 'el official Americano'—so they are worded—both she and her father will be murdered. You know the feeling that is abroad in regard to those who have shown us hospitality."

"Why not take her with you, then?"

"Her father, he would suffer."

"Take him too."

"That I proposed, but he will not consent. He fears

the confiscation of his property, which is considerable. I would not care for that, though my own fortune, as you know, would be small enough to support us. But the old man will go on no terms, and Rafaela will not leave him."

The old man's fears in regard to the confiscation were not without good foundation. There was a party in Mexico, while we occupied the city, that had advocated "annexation"—that is, the annexing of the whole country to the United States. This party consisted chiefly of pure Spaniards, "ricos" of the republic, who wanted a government of stability and order. In the houses of these many of our officers visited, receiving those elegant hospitalities that were in general denied us by Mexicans of a more patriotic stamp. Our friends were termed "Ayankeeados," and were hated by the populace. But they were marked in still higher quarters. Several members of the government, then sitting at Queretaro—among others a noted minister—had written to their agents in the city to note down all those who, by word or act, might show kindness to the American army. Even those ladies who should present themselves at the theatre were to be among the number of the proscribed.

In addition to the Ayankeeados were many families—perhaps not otherwise predisposed to favour us—who by accident had admitted us within their circle—such accident as that which had opened the house and heart of Rafaela to my friend L——. These, too, were under "compromisa" with the rabble. My comrade's case was undoubtedly what he had termed it—a dilemma.

"You are not disposed to give her up, then?" said I, smiling at my anxious friend, as I put the interrogation.

"I know you are only jesting, Henry. You know me

too well for that. No! Rather than give her up, I will stay and risk everything—even life.”

“Come, Major,” said I, “there will be no need for you to risk anything, if you will only follow my advice. It is simply this—come home with your regiment; stay a month or two at New Orleans, until the excitement consequent upon our evacuation cools down. Shave off your moustache, put on plain clothes; come back and marry Rafaela.”

“It is terrible to think of parting with her. Oh!——”

“That may all be; I doubt it not; but what else can you do?”

“Nothing—nothing. You are right. It is certainly the best—the only plan. I will follow it.” And I——left me.

I saw no more of him for three days, when the brigade to which he and I belonged, entered the city on its road homeward. He had detailed his plans to Rafaela, and had bid her, for a time, farewell.

The other three divisions had already marched. Ours was to form the rear-guard, and that night was to be our last in the city of Mexico. I had retired to bed at an early hour, to prepare for our march on the morrow. I was about falling asleep when a loud knock sounded at my door. I rose and opened it. It was L——. I started as the light showed me his face—it was ghastly. His lips were white, his teeth set, and dark rings appeared around his eyes. The eyes themselves glared in their sockets, lit up by some terrible emotion.

“Come!” cried he, in a hoarse and tremulous voice. “Come with me, Henry, I need you.”

“What is it, my dear L——? A quarrel? A duel?”

“No! no! nothing of the sort. Come! come! come!

I will show you a sight that will make a wolf of you. Haste ! For God's sake, haste !”

I hurried on my clothes.

“Bring your arms !” cried L—— ; “you may require them.”

I buckled on my sword and pistol-belt, and followed hastily into the street. We ran down the Calle Correo toward the Alameda. It was the road to the Convent of San Francisco, where our regiment had quartered for the night. As yet I knew not for what I was going. Could the enemy have attacked us ? No—all was quiet. The people were in their beds. What could it be ? L—— had not, and would not, explain ; but to my inquiries, continually cried, “Haste—come on !” We reached the convent, and, hastily passing the guard, made for the quarters occupied by my friend. As we entered the room—a large one—I saw five or six females, with about a dozen men, soldiers and officers. All were excited by some unusual occurrence. The females were Mexicans, and their heads were muffled in their rebozos. Some were weeping aloud, others talking in strains of lamentation. Among them I distinguished the face of my friend's betrothed.

“Dearest Rafaela !” cried L——, throwing his arms around her—“it is my friend. Here, Henry, look here ! look at this !”

As he spoke, he raised the rebozo, and gently drew back her long black hair. I saw blood upon her cheeks and shoulders ! I looked more closely. It flowed from her ears.

“Her ears ! *O God ! they have been cut off !*”

“Aye, aye,” cried L——, hoarsely ; and dropping the dark tresses, again threw his arms around the girl, and

kissed away the tears that were rolling down her cheeks—while uttering expressions of endearment and consolation.

I turned to the other females ; they were all similarly mutilated ; some of them even worse, for their foreheads, where the U.S. had been freshly burned upon them, were red and swollen. Excepting Rafaela, they were all of the “poblana” class—the laundresses—the mistresses of the soldiers.

The surgeon was in attendance, and in a short time all was done that could be done for wounds like these.

“Come !” cried L——, addressing those around him, “we are wasting time, and that is precious ; it is near midnight. The horses will be ready by this, and the rest will be waiting ; come Henry, you will go ? You will stand by us ?”

“I will, but what do you intend ?”

“Do not ask us, my friend, you will see presently.”

“Think, my dear L——,” said I, in a whisper ; “do not act rashly.”

“Rashly ! there is no rashness about me—you know that. A cowardly act, like this, cannot be revenged too soon. Revenge ! what am I talking of ? It is not revenge, but justice. The men who could perpetrate this fiendish deed are not fit to live on the earth, and by Heavens ! not one of them shall be alive by the morning. Ha, dastards ! they thought we were gone ; they will find their mistake. Mine be the responsibility,—mine the revenge. Come, friends ! come !” ; And so saying L—— led the way, holding his betrothed by the hand. We all followed out of the room, and into the street.

On reaching the Alameda, a group of dark objects was seen among the trees. They were horses and horsemen ; there were about thirty of the latter, and enough of the

former to mount the party who were with L——. I saw from their size that the horses were of our own troops, with dragoon saddles. In the hurry L——had not thought of saddles for our female companions; but the oversight was of no consequence. Their habitual mode of riding was *à la Duchesse de Berri*, and in this way they mounted. Before summoning me, L—— had organized his band—they were picked men. In the dim light I could see dragoon and infantry uniforms, men in plain clothes, followers of the army, gamblers, teamsters, Texans, desperadoes, ready for just such an adventure. Here and there I could distinguish the long-tailed frock—the undress of the officer. The band, in all, mustered more than forty men.

We rode quietly through the streets, and, issuing from the gate of Nino Perdido, took the road for San Angel. As we proceeded onward I gathered a more minute account of what had transpired at the village. As soon as our division had evacuated it, a mob of thirty or forty ruffians had proceeded to the houses of those whom they termed “Ayankeeados,” and glutted their cowardly vengeance on their unfortunate victims. Some of these had been actually killed in attempting to resist; others had escaped to the Pedregal which runs close to the village; while a few—Rafaela among the number—after submitting to a terrible atrocity, had fled to the city for protection.

On hearing the details of these horrid scenes, I no longer felt a repugnance in accompanying my friend. I felt as he did, that men capable of such deeds were “not fit to live,” and we were proceeding to execute a sentence that was just, though illegal. It was not our intention to punish all; we could not have accomplished this, had we so willed it. By the testimony of the girls, there were five

or six who had been the promoters and ringleaders of the whole business. These were well known to one or other of the victims, as in most instances it had been some old grudge for which they had been singled out, as objects of this cowardly vengeance. In Rafaela's case it was a ruffian who had once aspired to her hand, and had been rejected. Jealousy had moved the fiend to this terrible revenge.

It is three leagues from Mexico to San Angel. The road runs through meadows and fields of magueys. Except the lone *pulqueria*, at the corner where a cross path leads to the hacienda of Narvarte, there is not a house before reaching the bridge of Coyoacan. Here there is a cluster of buildings—"fabricas"—which, during the stay of our army, had been occupied by a regiment. Before arriving at this point we saw no one; and here, only people who, waked from their sleep by the tread of our horses, had not the curiosity to follow us.

San Angel is a mile further up the hill. Before entering the village we divided into five parties, each to be guided by one of the girls. L——'s vengeance was especially directed towards the *ci-devant* lover of his betrothed. She herself, knowing his residence, was to be our guide.

Proceeding through narrow lanes, we arrived in a suburb of the village, and halted before a house of rather stylish appearance. We had dismounted outside the town, leaving our horses in charge of a guard. It was very dark, and we clustered around the door. One knocked—a voice was heard from within—Rafaela recognized it as that of the ruffian himself. The knock was repeated, and one of the party who spoke the language perfectly, called out:—

"Open the door! Open, Don Pedro!"

"Who is it?" asked the voice.

"Yo," (I) was the simple reply.

This is generally sufficient to open the door of a Mexican house, and Don Pedro was heard within, moving toward the "Saguan."

The next moment the great door swung back on its hinges, and the ruffian was dragged forth. He was a swarthy fierce-looking fellow—from what I could see in the dim light—and made a desperate resistance, but he was in the hands of men who soon overpowered and bound him. We did not delay a moment, but hurried back to the place where we had left our horses. As we passed through the streets, men and women were running from house to house, and we heard voices and shots in the distance. On reaching our rendezvous we found our comrades, all of whom had succeeded in making their capture.

There was no time to be lost; there might be troops in the village—though we saw none—but whether or not, there were "leperos" enough to assail us. We did not give them time to muster. Mounting ourselves and our prisoners we rode off at a rapid pace, and were soon beyond the danger of pursuit.

Those who have passed through the gate Nino Perdido will remember that the road leading to San Angel runs, for nearly a mile, in a straight line, and that, for this distance, it is lined on both sides with a double row of large old trees. It is one of the drives (paseos) of Mexico. Where the trees end, the road bends slightly to the south. At this point a cross road strikes off to the pueblito of Piedad, and at the crossing there is a small house, or rather a temple, where the pious wayfarer kneels in his dusty devotions. This little temple, the residence of a hermitical monk, was uninhabited during our occupation of the valley,

and, in the actions that resulted in the capture of the city, it had come in for more than its share of hard knocks. A battery had been thrown up beside it, and the counter-battery had bored the walls of the temple with round shot. I never passed this solitary building without admiring its situation. There was no house nearer it than the aforementioned "tinacal" of Narvarte, or the city itself. It stood in the midst of swampy meadows, bordered by broad plats of the green maguey, and this isolation, together with the huge old trees that shadowed and sang over it, gave the spot an air of romantic loneliness.

On arriving under the shadow of the trees, and in front of the lone temple, our party halted by order of their leader. Several of the troopers dismounted, and the prisoners were taken down from their horses. I saw men uncoiling ropes that had hung from their saddle-bows, and I shuddered to think of the use that was about to be made of them.

"Henry," said L——, riding up to me and speaking in a whisper, "they must not see this."—He pointed to the girls.—"Take them some distance ahead and wait for us; we will not be long about it, I promise."

Glad of the excuse to be absent from such a scene, I put spurs to my horse, and rode forward, followed by the females of the party. On reaching the circle near the middle of the paseo I halted.

It was quite dark, and we could see nothing of those we had left behind us. We could hear nothing—nothing but the wind moaning high up among the branches of the tall poplars; but this, with the knowledge I had of what was going on so near me, impressed me with an indescribable feeling of sadness.

L—— had kept his promise; he was not long about it.

In less than ten minutes the party came trotting up, chatting gaily as they rode, but their prisoners had been left behind ! * * * *

As the American army moved down the road to Vera Cruz, many travelling carriages were in its train. In one of these were a girl and a gray-haired old man. Almost constantly during the march a young officer might be seen riding by this carriage, conversing through the windows with its occupants within.

A short time after the return troops landed at New Orleans, a bridal party were seen to enter the old Spanish cathedral ; the bridegroom was an officer who had lost an arm. His fame and the reputed beauty of the bride had brought together a large concourse of spectators.

"She loved me," said L—— to me on the morning of this his happiest day ; "she loved me in spite of my mutilated limb, and should I cease to love her because she has——no, I see it not ; she is to me the same as ever."

And there were none present who saw it ; few were there who knew that under those dark folds of raven hair were the *souvenirs* of a terrible tragedy. * *

The Mexican government behaved better to the Ayan-keados than was expected. They did not confiscate the property ; and L—— is now enjoying his fortune in a snug hacienda, somewhere in the neighbourhood of San Angel.

THE BROKEN BITT.

SEVERAL months after our army* had made its fighting *entrée* into the capital of Mexico, the regiment known as the "Texan Rangers" arrived in that city. I am not very certain but that their approach, peaceful as it was, created almost as much terror in the minds of the inhabitants, as our sword-in-hand entrance had occasioned three months before. The name "Tejano" in the ears of a Mexican, sounded with a fearful emphasis, as Goth might have done to a Roman, or Cossack to a plain Christian. Many of them thought they would now be called upon to answer for the sins of Santa Anna, for the treason of Santa Fé, the slaughter of the Alamo, and the *battue* at Goliad. In the midst of this ludicrous consternation, the Texans rode quietly into the piazza, and breaking up into squadrons, filed off to their respective quarters. In a few hours the minds of the Mexicans became once more tranquil. They were not to be plundered, after all!

I shall never forget the appearance of the Texan Rangers as they pulled up in the Piazza—I could not call the movement a halt. If I live, I shall make an

* By *our* army is understood the American forces.

attempt to describe it. I say an attempt, for, to do justice to that ragged *coup-d'œil* is beyond the privilege of the pen. The brush might do it, handled by a Hogarth ; and had that excellent artist been in my place, there and then, we might have had a picture that would have drawn laughter so long as paint and canvas stuck together. Here we have no room for details. One point, however, must be noted, as it relates to our subject—the horses—for be it known, the Rangers were mounted men. Instead of the large cavalry horses which the government had put under them some six months before, each ranger now straddled a scraggy mustang, his boot-heel, with its rusty spur raking the ground as he rode along. What had become of the original “mount” ? That was the question, which was answered thus :—The regiment had just made its march of several hundred leagues through the enemy’s country, halting at various places. During the halts, the rich *hiciendados* coveting the fine steeds of Kentucky—colossal when compared with their own gingery jennets—offered freely for them. A series of “swops” had been the consequence. The Texan, at a horse trade keen as the edge of his bowie, took anything that could carry a saddle, at the same time receiving a “mighty heap” of dollars to square the exchange. In this way they had brought themselves down to the ill-conditioned nags upon which they made their first appearance in the capital. Strange to say, these grew fat in a trice, although they were constantly on the scout ; seldom idle long enough to let their backs get dry. There was no rest for the Rangers. One week riding fifty leagues to capture Santa Anna ; the next, after Paredes, or the robbers of the Cerro ; the next, on the trail of the Padre Jarauta ; and yet, despite this journeying and fatigue, it was observed by every one that the Rangers’

horses, though still only mustangs, became as fat and plump as if they had been standing all the time with their heads in a corn-crib. It was wonderful to see horses thus fattening upon hard work !

Some endeavoured to account for it, by insinuating that they were not the same cattle upon which the regiment was mounted on its arrival—that the “swopping system” was still practised along the road, and frequently with only one party present at the “trade.” There were such insinuations I remember well. Perhaps they were slanders, perhaps not. I leave it a question of inference.

About this time I was told of a splendid mare that was in the possession of one of the Rangers. Of course she was for sale. I wished just then to obtain such an animal ; so, drawing three months’ pay (being in all about 300 dollars), I rode over to the Texan quarters—intending, if the mare pleased me, to make a bid.

She was led out, and proved to be worthy of her reputation—a large brown Arabian, with jet black legs and sweeping tail, while her head and neck were graceful as an antelope’s.

While examining her, I noticed a small brand upon her left hind flank. I observed at the same time that some diligence had been used to render the mark “unswearable.” After a little puzzling and adjusting of hair, I made out the letter C.

“What is this ?” I asked.

“It er the mark of a hot iron. Yer can see that, kint ye ?”

“I can ; but this mare is no mustang ?”

“Aint a mustang neyther,” responded the Ranger, whittling away at a strop of leather which he held in his hand, and seeming utterly indifferent to everything else.

"Why, then, has she been marked?" I inquired. "It is not usual for Americans to brand their horses, excepting those that belong to the government. Then they're branded U.S.; this mark is a C."

"Well, then, stranger, if you must know all about it, the mar' wur tuk from our people on the grand, by that ar chapparil fox Canales. He burned in that 'C.' C stands for Canales, I reckon."

"That's true, and for many other names as well. But how did you get her back again?"

"Wagh! we kumd upon Canales an' his yellerbellies, an' tuk her from them ag'in, afore the singed har had done smokin'. Now er yer satisfied?"

I was not. It is true, the story was probable enough. The mare was not Mexican, that was plain. The horse of that country is of a peculiar race, and is as easily distinguished from the English or American Arab, as a sheep is from a goat. Still she bore a Mexican mark, and had been in the possession of some of these people. She might have been, as the Ranger stated, one of our own horses captured and recaptured on the upper line; but I had not observed any such animal with the Texans on their arrival; and as I had heard that the *ricos* of Mexico had, from time to time, imported blood stock from England and the United States, I feared that she might prove to be one of these. The voice of the Texan interrupted my reflection.

"The critter's Kaintuck," continued he—"true Kaintuck. She wur brought down on the Grand, by a loote-nant at the breakin' out o' this hyar muss. She were at Paler Alter, an' at Monterey, an' Bony Veesty; and at that Hashendy, the time as Dan Drake rid the hundred-mile gallop on Cash Clay's mar'. Old Kaintuck she er, an' nothin' else. They don't raise such cattle in these hyar

diggins, I reckon'. Yee-up, old gal; hold up yer corn-trap; thar's money bid for ye!"

At the end of this curious monologue, the mare threw up her head and neighed long and loudly.

"Come, my man," said I, "what's the meaning of that?"

The neigh was peculiar, and struck me as that of a mare who had been recently separated from her colt.

"She's a whigherin' for a hoss, that's hyar," answered the Ranger coolly. "They haint been separate a half-an-hour for more 'n a yar, I reckon'. Hev they, Bill?"

"That they haint," replied the man appealed to, one of a crowd of Texans who had gathered around us.

"They're in the same kumpny, an' rid in the same file," continued the owner of the mare. "She won't bear that ar leetle hoss out o' her sight a minit. One o' the boys hes tuk *him* out to water. That's why she whighers, aint it, Bill?"

"Taint nothin' else," replied the *confrère*.

"But," said I, "it is strange I did not see this mare when you first came up. I was in the Piazza, and took particular notice of your horses. I think I should have remarked such a fine-looking animal as this."

"Look hyar, stranger," answered the Texan, somewhat irritated by this cross-questioning. "I brought this mar' up the road along with the raygymment. If yer want to buy her, yer kin do it, by givin' a fair vally for her. If yer don't, there's no bones broke, an' I don't care a nigger's darn. If I only take her out to the Palaza, I kin git my axin' from one o' these Mexikins in the twinklin' o' a goat's eye. Can't I, Bill?"

"Yes, siree," responded Bill.

"Yer say ye didn't see her when we kum up. That aint nothin' strange. She war kivered with sweet an' dust, inch deep ; besides, she wur thin then as old bull in snow time. She aint to say fat yit, but she's improved some, I reckon'. Aint she, Bill?"

"A dog-goned heap," was the ready response of Bill.

I was so taken with the appearance of the beautiful creature, that I determined to run the risk, and purchase her. I might have to give her up again to some gentleman claiming his property ; but, thought I, I can easily recover my money, as the Ranger will be glad to pay it back to me, rather than spend his time in the guard-house.

"How much?" I asked, having made up my mind to buy.

"The zact figger yer want?"

"Yes, the exact figure."

"Two-fifty : cheap enough, I reckon'. Aint it, Bill?"

"Dog cheap," was the laconic answer.

I offered two hundred. It wouldn't do. The cunning Ranger saw that I was "bound" to have her, and stood up to his first asking. I raised my bid to two hundred and twenty-five.

"Won't take a picayune less nor two-fifty. She's a'mighty cheap at it. She er the finest mar' in all Mexiko. That's sartin."

After a while, I saw that the man was inexorable ; and, drawing out my purse, I counted down the required amount. A bill of sale, which was signed by the Ranger, and witnessed by his comrade, Bill, completed the "trade," and the mare was forthwith transferred to my quarters. Under the nimble brush and comb of my Mexican groom,

Vicente, she soon became the most admired piece of horse-flesh that made its appearance on the Pasáo.

About ten days after, a party of us (we had nothing to do at the time) came to the resolve to visit Real del Monte, a rich silver-mine in the mountains that skirt the north-east of the valley. A division of our army was stationed there, and some of our old *comarados* had sent us an "invite" to come up and explore the mines—adding that two or three very hospitable English *haciendados* lived in that neighbourhood.

We could not resist, and consequently made ready to start. There were eight or ten of us in all, who had asked and obtained leave; and as we intended to include in our excursion the old town of Tezcoco and the pyramids of Teotihuacan—a guerilla neighbourhood—we borrowed a score of dragoons to escort us. I had resolved to try my new purchase upon the road on this occasion.

The morning of our departure arrived, and I was about to throw my leg over the saddle, when I was accosted by a small, spare man, with the salutation—

"*Buenas días, capitan!*"

There was nothing in the words strange or unusual, nor, indeed, in the individual who pronounced them; but there was something in the manner of this gentleman that told me at once he had some business with me.

"Well, señor," I asked, "what is it?"

The stranger hesitated for a moment, and then looking at the mare, replied, "*La yegua, capitan.*"

"The mare—well, what of her?" I asked, with a beating heart.

"I regret to inform you, captain, that you have purchased a stolen horse;" and the little man bowed politely as he said it.

Had it been an order from the commander-in-chief, placing me under arrest, I should not have been so much vexed at it. I had grown so fond of this animal that I would cheerfully have paid down another two hundred and fifty rather than part with her, and this I saw plainly I would now have to do.

"Stolen!" I echoed involuntarily.

"Yes, captain, it is true."

"And from whom? From you, sir?"

"No, captain; from Don Miguel Castro."

"And you?"

"I am his agent—his *mayorazgo*—nothing more."

"Don Miguel Castro," thought I. "Yes—C for Castro—yes, all as he says, no doubt of it. I must give up the mare."

"Well, my dear sir," I asked, after a pause, "how am I to know that your statement is true?"

"Here, captain—here is the certificate of Señor Smeeth." Saying this, the little man handed me a folded document, on opening which I found it to be a bill of sale delivered by the celebrated Joe Smith, of Mexican horse-dealing notoriety, and describing the property to a hair.

"This seems quite correct," I observed, returning the bill; "but it will be necessary for you to prove this claim before the commander-in-chief; and when that is done I shall deliver you your mare. *Adios, caballero!*"

So saying, I rode off to overtake my companions, determined, since I must part with the animal, first to have one good ride out of her.

We spent about a week in the mountains, enjoying every amusement that our friends could provide for us. We found the English *haciendados* worthy of their reputation. What a contrast between the cheer of their Saxon

hospitality and the cold welcome of the selfish Iberian ! But we approached the limits of our "leave," and must get back to duty and the city. After a parting and a promise to return, we leaped once more to the saddle, and headed our horses homeward.

It was our intention to have made the journey back in one day, but the stirrup-cup had delayed us at starting ; and night—a very dark one at that season—overtook us as we crossed the isthmus between lakes Tezcoco and San Cristobal. The road was deep, miry, and bordered by bottomless *zancas* of mud and water. The little village of San Cristobal lay by the border of the lake, at some distance ; and wheeling out of the road, we approached it, intending to remain there till morning. The *pueblito* was reached at length, and with the *alcalde*'s permission, our horses were picketed in the plazza, and ourselves put in possession of an empty *cuarto*, which, with several millions of fleas, was placed at our disposal. Money was offered freely, but no supper could be had ; and when it was not to be procured for money, we had experience enough among these people to know that it was not to be had at all. A dish of *frijoles* stewed in lard, a *tortilla*, and a bowl of sour *pulque*, were all that we could raise ; and, after swallowing this, we lit our cigars, spread our blankets both over and under the fleas, and commenced arranging ourselves for the night.

It so happened that I could talk Spanish "like a book," and, furthermore, that I was the only one in our party who possessed this accomplishment. The *alcalde*, in consequence, directed all his conversation to me, and, being a sociable old fellow, he had become very fond of me. He had remained with us until a late hour, and during this time I had offered him a *havanna*, which he had accepted and

smoked with much seeming enjoyment. As I was about seizing my blanket to make my "spread" along with the rest, old José Maria—for this was the alcalde's name—plucked me gently by the sleeve, and whispered in my ear that "*su casa*" was "*a mi disposicion.*" I was about to translate this hospitable proffer according to its usual French and Spanish signification, when it was repeated in a more pressing manner; and as I was not very difficult to coax away from the *cuarto*, I took José Maria at his word, and followed him across the plazza. On the other side was *su casa*. We entered it at once, and were welcomed by a fat, buxom-looking old lady, who proved to be Don José's left rib. Another lady made her appearance shortly after, who was neither so old, nor so fat, nor so buxom as the doña, but whose complexion was very dusky, with a dangerous black eye peeping from under a dark, crescent-shaped eyebrow. This, I was given to understand, was the only fruit of Don José's wedded life; and not bad-looking fruit either.

The ladies spent but little time in idle phrases of welcome. José snapped his fingers, and in a twinkling, a turkey hash with a large dish of *molé*, were smoking upon the table. There were other dishes, too—pleasant little *entrées*, spiced and flavoured with all sorts of *chilé*.

As I ate my supper with the alcalde and his compact little family, I could not help chuckling at the advantage I had gained over my supperless, and, no doubt, sleepless companions. Neither was my exultation diminished when, near the end of the repast, old José Maria stepped up to an alcove and drew out a quaint, queer old bottle, whose waxen seal conjured up exciting visions of the port of Funchal and the peak of Teneriffe.

I was fortunately enabled, through my cigar-case, to

contribute to the evening's entertainment ; and my host and I sat for an hour after the ladies had retired, discussing our wine and tobacco, and talking of the Texan Rangers, of which corps the worthy magistrate had rather a low opinion. It appeared that they had paid the neighbourhood a visit not long before, behaving upon the occasion in no very creditable manner.

It was late, or early if you will, when José inverted the bottle for the last time, and pressing my hand with a "*pasa V. buena noche !*" the Mexican showed me to my chamber. Here I found one of the great and rare luxuries of this land—a couch with clean sheets ; and in the "twinkling of a bedpost" I was between the latter, and forgetful of everything.

When I awoke in the morning, I found my comrades in the piazza, making ready to start. It was still only grey dawn, but as they were all sadly flea-bitten, and knew that nothing could be had to eat in San Cristobal, they had made up their minds to ride on, and breakfast at Guadalupe. I was preparing to accompany them, when José whispered in my ear that breakfast would be on the table in five minutes, and I must wait for it. This was a tempting offer. My health was excellent, and half-a-dozen mouthfuls of the fresh morning air had given me a keen appetite.

"If the breakfast," thought I, "bear any sort of proportion to last night's supper, it's worth waiting for ; better than we are likely to get at Guadalupe ; besides, 'a bird in the hand,' " &c. I could soon overtake my companions on my fine mare, which had by this time proved herself a first-class roadster.

I placed my lips under the broad brim of José's, and repeated the words, "*Con gusto.*"

"*Esta bueno*," replied José, slipping back into his house.

The next moment my companions had ridden off into the obscure twilight, and I was left alone in the village. None of my friends, I believe, had noticed that I stayed behind ; and if they had, it would not have called forth a remark, as I was considered old enough to take care of myself.

My host proved as good as his word ; for in five minutes, or less, the breakfast was steaming on the table ; nor did it do any discredit to the supper. There were ham and eggs ; a ham omelette ; a chicken *fricase* ; a dish of *chilé rilléno* ; another of *chilé colorado* ; plenty of good claret, to wash down the peppers ; and after that, a cup of the coffee which only Spaniards can make. Then there was a glass of good old Maraschino, and a cigar to "top off with," and as the morning was now tiptoe, I rose to take my leave. I shook hands with the señora, then with the señorita ; and, amidst a shower of benedictions, I walked forth, followed by José Maria himself. My mare stood near the door, ready saddled. I threw the bridle over her neck, and was about to plant my foot in the stirrup, when my host touched me lightly on the left arm, and holding out a small slip of paper, with a sort of apologetic smile, uttered the words, "*Sa cuenta chiquita, capitan*." (The small bill, captain.)

"A bill !" I exclaimed, as soon as I had recovered from my astonishment.

"*Chiquitita*," (Very, very small) coolly responded José.

I took the "*cuenta chiquitita*" in my fingers, and opening it, read—" *Un peso por cena—un peso por cama—un peso por almuerzo—tres pesos por vino :—Suma,*

seis pesos." (Anglice: Supper, one dollar—bed, one dollar—breakfast, one dollar—wine, three dollars. Total, six dollars.)

"It's a joke the old fellow's playing me," thought I.

I looked at José, then at the bill; then back at José again, putting on a knowing smile, to show him that I was up to his fun; but after carrying on this dumb show for some moments, I perceived that not a muscle of the Mexican's face betrayed the slightest motion. His features remained as rigid as the bronze statue of Carlos Quinto that stood in the capital; and, after scanning them fairly, I became satisfied there was no joke either "meant or intended."

Arriving at this conclusion, my first impulse was to make his "worship" eat the bill, and then leap to my saddle, and show him "clean heels;" but this, I saw on reflection, would be but a shabby reckoning on my part. True I had fared well; but it was vexatious to be thus "chizzled," and in such a scandalous manner. It could not be mended, however; and mentally promising never again to trust Mexican hospitality, I drew forth my purse, and reluctantly counted out the "*seis pesos.*" Then both mentally and verbally sending José to a climate hotter than the tropics, I touched my mare's flank, and left the village in a gallop.

I was so "bitter mad" at the trick played upon me, that I did not draw bridle for a mile or more. After that, checking my fiery animal, I fell into an easy canter, and laughed till I was nearly hoarse. I kept straight on for Guadalupe, expecting to overhaul my friends in the middle of their breakfast.

I had not the slightest intention of showing them the "*cuenta chiquitita,*" or saying a word about it. No, no; I should have preferred paying it twice over.

With these reflections, occasionally making the woods ring with my laughter, I had reached to within five miles of San Cristobal, when, all at once, my mare uttered a loud neigh, and sprang into a by road. The reins had been thrown loosely upon her neck; and before I could collect them, she was fairly into the new track, and going at top-speed! I dragged with all my might upon the bitt—which happened to be a “fool’s fancy,” lightly constructed—when, to my mortification, one of the rings gave way, and the rein came back with a jerk. I had now only one rein. With this I could have brought her up on open ground, but we were running up a narrow lane, and on each side was a treble row of magueys, forming a most fearful-looking *chevaux-de-frise*!

Had I pulled the mare to either side, she would have certainly tripped up in the magueys, and impaled me on their bayonet-shaped spikes. I could do nothing better than keep my seat, and let her run it out. She would not be long about it, at the rate she was going, for she ran as if on a course, and staked ten to one against the field. At intervals she would throw up her head, and utter that strange wild neigh which I had noticed on first seeing her.

On we went through the tall aloes, the rows of plants looking like a green fringe as we shot past them. We came up to several *ranchós*. The *leperos* that lounged about the doors threw up their hats, and shouted “*Viva!*” The *ranchos* fell behind. A large house—a *hacienda*—lay before. I could see beautiful women clustering into the windows as I approached. Gilpin and Don Quixote came into my head.

“Good heavens!” thought I. “what will they think of my riding past in this ludicrous style?”

Riding past ! I had scarcely given words to the thought, when my mare wheeled sharply to the left—almost flinging me out of my seat—and dashed right into the main gateway of the mansion ! Three more springs, and she was in the *patio*, where, stopping like a shot, she threw up her head, uttered another neigh, and stood looking wildly round, with heaving, smoking flanks. The neigh had scarcely echoed when it was answered from within ; and the next moment a half-grown colt came loping through a doorway, and ran up with all the demonstrations of a filial recognition.

I had not time to recover from my surprise when a lovely apparition flashed out of the *portale*, and came running across the *patio*. It was a girl—something between a girl, a woman, and, I might add, a goddess.

Without heeding or seeming to notice my presence, she rushed up and flung her arms around the neck of my Arab, which bent its head to receive the embrace. The girl then pressed her lips against the velvet-like muzzle of the animal, all the while muttering exclamations, as—

Ah ! mia yegua buenita ! Mora, Morita, dígame de donde viene, Morita ? " (Ah, my pretty little mare ! pretty Mora, little Mora, tell me whence come you, little Mora ?)

And the mare replied to all this by a low neighing, turning from one to the other of the two objects that caressed her, and seemingly at a loss to know to which she should give most of her attention.

I sat speechless, looking down at the strange scene—at the beautiful girl—at her shining black hair (a cloth-yard long), as it hung loosely over her white, nude shoulders—at her rounded snowy arms—at her dark flashing eyes—at her cheeks, mounted with the hue of health and beauty—

at her small red lips, as, like crushed rosebuds, they were pressed against the smooth skin of the Arab.

"Oh, I am dreaming!" thought I. "I am still between old José's comfortable sheets. It's the Teneriffe has done it all, and the *cuenta chiquitita* is only a joke after all. Ha, ha, ha! I have paid no bill to the worthy alcalde—hospitable old fellow! It's all a dream—all."

But at this point of my reflections, several other ladies made their appearance in the *portale*, and several gentlemen, too, and the great gateway was fast filling up with the *pelados* who had hooted me as I passed the *rancheria*. It was no dream, then; I had settled one account, and I was fast becoming sensible that I should shortly be called upon to settle another.

Fortunately the fog caused by old José's Maraschino had now cleared away, and I began to comprehend how the "camp was pitched." It was certain that my mare *had got home*. That was plain enough. It was equally certain that the old gentleman with the white moustache, and dark stern eyebrows, was Don Miguel Castro. These two points were as clear as daylight. It was very evident that I had got myself, or rather the mare had got me, into a most awkward predicament. How was I to get out of it? This was by no means clear.

Should I confess all, and throw myself on their mercy? It was a queer-looking gang by the gateway. They wouldn't wish better sport than to chuck me into a horse-pond, or string me up to the limb of a tree. No, it would never do to confess. I must account for the broken bridle to save a broken head. I need hardly mention that these were only silent thoughts. But at that moment a plan of escape from my dilemma came into my mind.

By that time the gentlemen, headed by the old don,

had descended into the *patio* and approached the mare, upon whose back I still kept my seat. Hitherto they had exhibited indications of alarm. They supposed at first that a troop of Texan Rangers was at my heels. Becoming satisfied, in consequence of the reports of the *rancheros*, that I was alone, they now surrounded me with stern, inquiring looks. There was no time to be lost. I must not allow them to speculate on how the bridle came to be broken, or that they were indebted to the mare alone, for my visit. No, that would never do; so, throwing my legs over the croup, I landed upon the pavement with as much deliberation as if I had been dismounting at my own stable-door. Assuming all the *sang-froid* I could muster, I walked up to the old gentleman in grey, and making him a polite bow, said interrogatively—

“Don Miguel Castro?”

“*Si señor*,” replied he, in a hurried manner, and, as I fancied, somewhat angrily.

“This is your mare?”

“*Si señor*,” in the same tone and manner.

“She was lately stolen from you?”

“*Si señor*,” with the like emphasis.

“By a Texan Ranger?”

“*Por un ladron*” (by a robber), replied the Mexican, with an angry look, which I observed was copied by very dark countenances appearing all around me.

“He certainly was not an honest man,” I answered, with a smile. “You have an agent in Mexico,” continued I, “who has claimed this animal in your name?”

“*Si señor*.”

“I had purchased her from the Texan, who deceived me as to her previous history.”

"I know all that," was the prompt response.

"I told your agent—not knowing him—that I could not give her up until his claim was made good before the commander-in-chief, or until I could have the honour of an interview with yourself."

"*Bueno !*"

"I was passing with a party of friends, and, leaving them, I entered the road leading to your residence, and, as you see, I am here. I should apologize for the *manner* of my approach. The animal, overjoyed at heading towards her home, made a complete run away with me, and, as you may observe, has broken the bitt-ring."

There was the least little bit of a white lie in this, but I felt that my life was in extreme danger. The Texans had harried this neighbourhood not a month before—in fact, at the time the mare was stolen. Several men had been killed upon the occasion. The inhabitants were much exasperated in consequence, and would have thought little of making me the victim of retaliatory vengeance, by jerking me up to a tree. I think, therefore, I was rather justified in the slight colouring I gave to my narrative.

Don Miguel stood for some time as if puzzled at what I had said.

"You say, then, the mare is yours?" I resumed, breaking the silence.

"*Si señor, esta mia,*" was the reply.

"Will you have the goodness to order one of your vants to remove the saddle and bridle?"

This was done as desired.

"May I request you to keep them in safety until I can have an opportunity to send for them?"

"Certainly, sir," replied the don, brightenin up.

“And now, sir, may I ask you to certify that you have recovered your mare, since that will be necessary to enable me to recover my money?”

By this time the don and his party were quite overcome by my *rare generosity*! The stern looks disappeared; the *pelados* were driven out of the *patio*; and in five minutes more I found myself stretching my limbs under the family table, and on the best of terms with the whole household, including the little goddess before mentioned, who proved to be the real owner of the Arab. It was lucky for me that I was not quartered in that vicinity, or she might have become the owner of something that I could less conveniently have parted with. As it was, I came out of the fire of her brilliant eyes almost unhurt, which I may attribute to the insensibility produced by a very choice article of old “Bordeos” that was exhumed from the vaults under Don Miguel’s mansion.

I came off—I can hardly tell how. I remember clambering into a yellow carriage, and rolling along a level road. I remember meeting a party of mounted men, who said they had been sent out to look for me, and then I remember——

* * * * *

Two days afterwards I went to seek the Ranger, and learned, to my chagrin, that he was gone. His company had been ordered down the road, as the escort of a train to Vera Cruz, where they were to be disbanded and sent home. Had I lost my two hundred and fifty dollars? Not so. On my return from Mexico, in June, 1848, I accidentally overhauled my man in the Ranger camp at Encerro. He was without a dollar. The *fandangüeras* of Jalapa had completely cleared him out; but, to do him justice, he *did* all in his power to make suitable reparation. Going

behind the tents, he returned in a minute or two, leading a large and handsome sorrel, which he delivered over to me with due formality, and with the following wind-up :—

“Thar aint no such hoss doins in this hyar camp. I tell yer, cap., thet thet ar mar’ wa’n’t a suckumstance to this hyar anymal.”

A TURKEY HUNT IN TEXAS.

By far the finest game bird in the world, is the wild turkey of America. It exceeds all others in size, in the ratio of two or three to one; and in delicacy of flesh it is not excelled by either partridge, grouse, or pheasant. The domesticated variety is much inferior to the wild, either in bulk of body, or quality of flesh; and in the markets of the United States, a wild turkey of equal weight with a common one, will always command a much higher price—partly from the greater scarcity of the dish, but as much on account of its superior delicacy.

Before proceeding to hunt the wild turkey, some account of the habits of this beautiful bird may not be out of place. He stands—for we speak more particularly of the “gobbler,” or cock—full four feet on his robust red legs: while his wings, which are rather short in proportion to his bulk, have a spread of about five. When of largest size, he weighs forty pounds avoirdupois. His body is finely proportioned, with a small head and tapering neck. In shape, he is far superior to his loose, high shouldered representative of the farm-yard, and more resembles his proud congener, the peacock; while in colour, although

not so gaudy as the latter, still is he an hundred times more brilliant than his tame congener, that now for more than three centuries has been reduced to companionship with civilized man, and naturalized in almost every country upon the globe.

The general tints of the wild turkey gobbler are purple and rich brown ; but his close-lying plumes exhibit many other colours, frequently a beautiful violet gleaming upon them, according to the light in which the sun is reflected from their surface. The plumage all over presents a fine metallic lustre, which in most other birds is chiefly conspicuous on the gorget, breast, and shoulders. The neck is not so destitute of downy feathers as in the tame variety—having the skin and wart-like protuberances of a purplish blue colour, while the wattle proceeding from the crown is also furnished with a slight sprinkling of down ; and when the bird is excited, either by anger or by amorous propensity, this appendage becomes so elongated as to cover the beak, and hang several inches below it.

The tuft, resembling horse-hair, which grows out from the junction of the neck and breast, in a wild turkey-cock of full size, is often nearly a foot in length ! but for what purpose the bird has been furnished with this curious “tress,” is one of the mysteries of nature.

The geographical range of this fine bird is longitudinally extensive. Its northern boundary may be regarded as the British possessions, while to the south it is found as far as the Isthmus of Panama. The wild turkey is often spoken of by, not very observant, travellers who have visited South America ; but the supposition is, that the birds mentioned by these writers, were some of the larger species of the *Cracidae* or *curraesows*.

It is also probable that the beautiful ocellated turkey of

Southern Mexico and Central America, may be an inhabitant of the countries south of Panama: as the same circumstances of soil, climate, and vegetation exist there, as in the habitat where it is found.

Latitudinally, the wild turkey was supposed not to extend beyond the line of the Rocky Mountains. This is an error. Although there is no account of its being met with near the Pacific coast of California, yet has it been shot upon the Gila River, which lies westward of the Cordillera.

Throughout all the original United States territory—the great forest-covered tract between the Mississippi and the Atlantic—it was one of the commonest birds in the times of the early settlements; and it is still far from rare, in those parts of the States where large patches of woodland extend between the sparse plantations.

Westward of the Mississippi, on the “timber” prairies—especially those interspersed with copses of *pecan* and hickory-trees, as also some of the acorn-bearing oaks—wild turkeys may be often encountered in flocks of from eighty to a hundred.

It has hitherto been taken for granted, that only two species of wild turkey (*meleagris*) existed:—that properly so called, and the ocellated, or “Honduras turkey,” already mentioned. Of course, the *tallegalla*, or “wattled” turkey of Australia, is not taken into account in this enumeration: nor the common barn-yard breed, which has always been regarded as the mere domesticated variety of the *meleagris gullipavo*.

Discoveries, however, have lately been made by naturalists, which go far to prove that the wild turkey of North America is not only a distinct species from the domestic bird, but that the latter is of itself only distantly

related to another species, equally distinct from the wild turkeys of the United States country east of the Mississippi.

That which has been found throughout Mexico—and northward upon the Gila, and the elevated table plains on both sides of the Rio del Norte—in short, throughout the Rocky Mountain district—differs in many respects from the bird of the Alleghanian forests. It is even plausibly proved that our tame turkey could not have descended from the wild species of the Atlantic States—one of the arguments being, that all attempts hitherto made to reduce the latter to the condition of a dunghill fowl—and they have been many—have ended in complete failure.

It is certain that the European breed was not brought from the United States. It was introduced as early as the year 1530, and must therefore have been transported across the Atlantic by the Spaniards—either from Mexico or the West India islands.

The Mexican wild species—if it be a different species—is in some respects more like the tame variety than that of the north-eastern portion of the Continent; and it is more probable, in every way, that the former is the progenitor of the domestic breed.

Another hypothesis is, that on their arrival in the West Indies, the Spaniards found tame turkeys stalking about the huts of the islanders; and that it was from these they obtained the breed, since propagated over the whole civilized world; and that the domesticated variety, as we term it, is not sprung from either of the wild breeds—Mexican or North-American—but is a distinct species in itself.

This hypothesis, or speculation, is not without probability: since the bird of the barn-yard, instead of being an

improvement, even in bulk, upon the wild species, is in reality a retrograded and inferior creature.

If the theory be correct, there would be four distinct species of turkey—the American, the Mexican, the ocellated, and the tame—to say nothing of the queer *tallegalla*, or “wattled” turkey of Australia.

Space does not allow me to dwell long upon the habits of this bird. Suffice it to say that, like all the *gallinaceæ*, the wild turkey is gregarious, and is seen in large flocks or “gangs,” often numbering as many as a hundred. These flocks are differently constituted at different periods of the year.

In October they congregate into large promiscuous assemblages: that is, males, females, and young ones, better than half-grown, grouping together. They seek their food, which consists chiefly of vegetable substances, as berries, seeds, and grasses; but they do not confine themselves to an exclusively vegetable diet, and will greedily devour beetles, grubs, and even tadpoles, young frogs, and lizards.

Like all birds, at this season of the year they are in greatest numbers—the young broods having become fully fledged, and each counting from ten to fifteen in a family. Up to the time that the young are able to take care of themselves, the females keep them apart from the old males, which would otherwise destroy them, by repeatedly pecking them on the skull.

It is only as the autumn advances well into October, that all ages and sexes unite to form the large gangs; and for this reason October is the “turkey month” of the Indians.

Throughout the fall and winter they associate together, making long journeys across the country, rarely taking to

wing, except when sprung by wolves, foxes, or hunting-dogs, or when it becomes necessary for them to make the passage of a river ; for, like all migrating creatures, they do not permit any impediment to interrupt the course on which design or instinct impels them.

When about to effect the crossing of a river, they seek the highest eminence on the nether bank, and remain there sometimes for two or three days before making the attempt. The males at such times gobble most obstreperously, and strut over the ground with all the importance imaginable : as if to inspire the females and the young with courage for the undertaking. Even the females take part in these demonstrations, lowering their wings and spreading their tails, in imitation of their lordly mates.

After this sort of play has been carried on for a considerable time, the whole flock flies up to the highest branches of the adjacent trees ; and then, at a signal given by one acting as leader, all fly out over the water—directing their flight toward the opposite bank.

The old and strong birds easily effect the crossing ; but the younger and more feeble individuals of the gang frequently fall into the water. Not always, however, to be drowned ; as they can swim tolerably well—which they do by spreading their tails, folding their wings close to their bodies, protruding their long necks far above the surface, and alternately plying their feet in strong, rapid strokes.

Sometimes all do not succeed in reaching the bank. A few of the very feeblest, unable to swim with sufficient speed, get carried down by the current, and ultimately perish.

This is the winter life of the wild turkeys, when they become fat, changing their bulk from fifteen or twenty

pounds—which is their average weight—to thirty, and sometimes forty.

On the return of spring—in March—the females coquetishly separate themselves from the males; though the latter continue in flocks, following the former from place to place. Then commences the season of their loves; and though the sexes roost apart, their roosting-places are near each other. At this time the woods become animated by their vociferous calling; and if a female bird utters her note within hearing, it is taken up by scores of males, not with the gobble used by them on other occasions, but with an imitative cry, such as may be heard among their tame congeners of the farm-yard.

This calling is usually heard before the break of day; and as soon as the sun has fairly risen, the males descend from the trees, and commence strutting over the ground, with spread tail and wings, uttering at intervals the “tsut” peculiar to the species.

On such occasions two males meet, and then ensues a fight, ending in the defeat—often even the death—of the weaker. The conqueror is then joined by the female—or, more generally, females—that have been the object of this deadly rivalry; and, during the next month or so, he holds these as his harem, roosting by or near them, and performing the duties of a protector. In time, however, they become shy of him—stealing off to deposit their eggs; which, should he chance to discover them, will be instantly broken by the blows of his paternal beak!

The nest consists of a few dried leaves, collected carelessly on the ground—sometimes among the tops of a fallen tree, sometimes on a dry hillock in a thicket of sumach or bramble, or by the side of a dead log.

As already stated, the wild turkey is still to be found

within the limits of the old States of the American Union. It is more common in the Mississippi Valley, where it is still possible to obtain these birds in considerable numbers.

The usual mode of capturing them is by a trap—known as a turkey-trap—a contrivance of the simplest kind.

A square enclosure, of some six or eight feet wide, is constructed—the materials being split pieces of timber—usually the ordinary fence-rail, which is always eight feet in length.

These, resting at right angles on one another, form a rectangular enclosure, which, when carried up to the height of six or seven feet, is covered in by the same sort of rails, laid at regular intervals along the top. Care is taken that the spaces between them be not wide enough to permit the passage of a turkey; and the top rails are also secured by a heavy log, which hinders the bird—strong though he be—from forcing them out of their place. The trap is constructed on the declivity of a hill; and on the lower side, a cut or tunnel is excavated, leading under the bottom rail, inwards. The cut is then continued for a few yards down the slope, when it runs out to the common level of the ground.

This being completed, the trap is ready for work, and only requires baiting.

This is done by laying a train of maize (Indian corn), a hundred yards or so in length—commencing at any point in the woods, and carried along a line until it enters the hollowed way to the enclosure. Inside, a larger quantity of the corn is scattered, lying conspicuously upon the floor of the gigantic cage.

The gang of turkeys, taking their morning stroll, chance to come upon the train of scattered maize. They soon

gobble up the few grains sparsely distributed outside ; and step by step approach the enclosure. They are not shy of the rude structure ; for often have they wandered along the side of a rail-fence, or flopped over it, to commit devastation on the maize-crops of the planter. Even his corn-bins have not deterred them from pilfering his garnered crops. What else can this penn be, but a remote corn-bin in the middle of the woods, with the unhusked maize removed from it, leaving a few scattered grains upon the ground ?

The little ravine conducts them under the lowermost rail. They enter without hesitation—without fear ; and it is only after they have “gobbled” up the grains that seduced them inside, that they begin to think of continuing their stroll through the forest.

Then, for the first time, does the thought occur to any of them, that they are in a trap. It soon occurs, not only to one, but to all : and a fearful fluttering and screaming takes place, with a confusion of ideas, that prevents the oldest and wisest gobbler of the gang from finding his way out again.

With their eyes elevated far above the level of the excavated trench, they never think of looking downward ; and after spending hours, sometimes even days, inside the cunningly-contrived trap, they are at length released by the arrival of the trapper—but only to be transferred to the spit or the market-stall, with the dinner-table as their ultimate destination.

• In America, as in England, turkey is the chosen dish of the Christmas dinner-table—in America even more than in England. There, whatever else there may be of nick-nacks, *entrées*, and *hors d'œuvres*, turkey, roast or boiled, holds the prominent place—is the *pièce de résistance* of

the banquet. He is but a poor man indeed in that once great—to be hoped still great—republic, who could not have a turkey for his Christmas dinner.

Upon that most interesting holiday, the humblest artizan in America may dine upon tame turkey; but the greater luxury—the wild bird, with its dark flesh and game flavour—the true *meleagris*, trapped or taken from his remote forest feeding-ground—smokes only on the table of the citizen who has been more than ordinarily successful in the pursuits of life.

There may the wild turkey be seen, in all the perfection of size, succulence, and savour.

If old Buffon, the charlatan naturalist of France, could have but eaten a slice of the *meleagris* under such circumstances, he might, perhaps, have conceded to the birds of America some of the good qualities which he has so recklessly denied them.

But the palate of this presumptuous curator of moth-eaten remains, had never been indulged with the delicate flavour of a canvas-back duck, a “reed-bird,” a grouse of the prairies, or a wild turkey trapped amidst the solitudes of an American forest.

He had studied their habits only at second-hand, while their bright hues, their sweet songs, and their many other valuable qualities, he could only deduce, or deny, from the stuffed and damaged skins seen by him in a “royal collection.”

With such superiority of flesh, it is scarcely necessary to say, that there are people who make it their business to procure the wild turkey, and send the bird to market. There are a few men throughout the United States who follow this business as an exclusive calling; but more often the turkey is obtained as part of ~~the~~ game-bag of

the regular deer-hunter, and by him sold to the consumer.

The gun is used, as with other game-birds ; and when it is a fowling-piece, buck-shot—the swan-shot of European countries—is the kind necessarily required to kill such a large, strong bird. The regular deer-hunter, however, never thinks of carrying a fowling-piece ; and his peaarifle, with a barrel of nearly five feet in length, and bored for a bullet not much larger than the buck-shot itself, is with him the weapon for turkeys, deer, wolves, bears, panthers, and even Indians—if need be.

There is still another method of hunting the turkey, practised on the praries ; and that is with horses and hounds !

My young readers will no doubt be surprised to hear that a wild turkey, with wings over five feet in spread, can be captured by dogs. But such is the fact ; as I can assure them, by having myself ridden in many a chase of the sort, and more than once have I had the good fortune to be “in at the death.”

Taking the turkey after this fashion is called “running it down.”

I have practised this sport upon the beautiful prairies of Texas ; and as my first turkey-hunt after this fashion led me into a little adventure, which came very near having a serious termination, an account both of this peculiar mode of hunting—as well as the occurrence in my memory connected with it—may be given at the same time.

On a journey which I was making from Natchitoches, on the Red River of Louisiana, along the line of military posts (forts) established in Western Texas, I had occasion to stop for some days at the house of a cotton planter—living along the route.

My halt was one of necessity—to recruit my tired escort, as well as a fine horse I was riding, which, upon a journey that had extended several hundred miles through the wilderness, I had used somewhat badly. To make up for having abused him, I resolved upon giving him a few days' rest upon the plantation. I had letters of introduction to its owner; though these were by no means requisite to secure me a hospitable reception in the house of a Texan planter—especially with the official stamp afforded by the cut and colour of my coat.

As the planter was a man both of intelligence and circumstance—with three or four fine sons and as many grown-up girls—my halt at his house was far from being irksome; and perhaps I remained a day or two longer than exactly “squared” with my duty.

Be that as it may, I remember that I ate my Christmas dinner with them; and it was while procuring the *pièce de résistance* of that dinner—the *wild turkey*—that I became initiated into the peculiar mode of capturing these birds by “running them down.”

The custom of having turkey for the Christmas dinner has been transported by the colonists into the wilds of Texas; where it is as rigorously observed as in the “mother country”—the United States.

On the day preceding this Christmas holiday, a turkey-hunt was got up—in order that a bird or two might be obtained for the table.

At an early hour we set forth—a party on horseback, consisting of the planter himself, his sons, and one or two friends on a Christmas visit to the plantation.

Each of the party shouldering his fowling-piece or rifle—though, as I was informed, not with any design to use these weapons against the “gobblers,” but, only as a

providence in case of meeting with other and larger game.

Moreover, a Texan frontiersman without a gun over his shoulder—or carried across the pommel of his saddle—is a creature rarely to be encountered upon the prairies.

On that day the weapons, intended to be used against the turkeys, were horses and hounds ; and as we rode forth out of the enclosure of the planter's dwelling, I noticed some half score of the latter—an appanage of every Texan plantation—trotting along at the heels of our *cavayard*.

I was myself no little surprised, on being informed that this was the object for which the hounds were going out with us ; and I did not quite comprehend how the quadrupeds were to bring a bird *to bay*.

I could form some conjecture, however—founded on a past experience in the art of *venerie*. I remembered, while deer-hunting in the forests of the Mississippi bottom, that the hounds, especially when ill-trained ones, were often led away from the trail of the stag by that of wild turkeys ; and that the birds, although not seen among the underwood, frequently conducted the chase, for a mile or so, across the hills.

The turkeys would, at length, come to a stand, by taking refuge on the trees—thus leaving the hounds in a quandary, and the hunters in something approaching to a passion.

I knew, moreover, that the wild turkey rarely takes to wing—and then only when compelled by the necessity of crossing a river, or escaping from some dangerous pursuer, that has got too close to the tip of its tail.

Guided by these lights, I was not without some glimmer of a guess as to the nature of the sport upon which we were setting forth.

My considerate friends, not wishing that I should be taken by surprise—and in order that I should have fair play in procuring my share of the spoils—gave me a full account of the *modus venandi*, as we rode on towards the ground.

The prairie towards which we were proceeding—a noted haunt of the turkeys—was of that kind known in Texas, as a “timber” prairie; that is, a plain, interspersed with groves of great trees—at a greater or less distance apart from each other—with here and there small copses—in Texan parlance, “islands,”—intervening.

Sometimes the larger clumps of timber are so far apart as to be nearly out of sight of each other; while the verdant surface between exhibits a mottled aspect of darker tints, caused by the “islands,” with here and there some solitary tree—a giant evergreen oak—standing apart, as if disdaining to associate with the humbler growth constituting the copses.

On the prairie towards which we were proceeding, the timber growth was principally trees of the gener *juglans* and *carya*—among which the *pecan* was conspicuous—sometimes forming islands of itself. Of the delicious nuts of this last-mentioned tree, the wild turkey is what the French term *friand*—preferring them to all other food.

In the winter these nuts, having dropped ungarnered from the branches, lie neglected upon the ground—that is, by human beings, although not by the wild denizen of the prairies.

At such time the turkeys go in search of them—making long journeys beyond the more secure fastnesses of the great forest; and while straying among the *pecan* copses, and far out upon the open prairie, they become fair game for hounds and horses, and can be *run down* by either.

The mode of proceeding is to "approach" as near as possible without giving the birds the alarm; and then, calling out the "view halloo" to the dogs, and spurring the horses to their highest speed, the chase sweeps onward.

The turkeys, at the first start, whirr up into the air with a thundering noise; and usually fly to the distance of half a mile—when they drop down to the earth. On touching *terra firma*, however, they do not suspend their flight; for it is continued along the ground: almost as rapidly as in the air—both legs and wings being brought into play.

The chase for a time now very much resembles that of the ostrich; between which bird and the wild turkey there are many points of resemblance. The race is usually in a direct line, and towards some heavy timber, which may be seen in the distance.

Should the latter chance to be near, and up-hill from the point of starting, the turkey will distance both dogs and hunters, and escape to the trees. On the other hand, if a sufficient space of open prairie intervene, either level or down-hill, the quadrupeds will eventually close upon the birds, when the latter will once more take to wing.

This second appeal to his pinions is not so prolonged as the first; and after flying a few hundred yards, the gobbler will once more "come to grass," and go legging it, with outstretched neck and flopping wings as before—as before to be overhauled by hounds and horsemen.

Perhaps he may attempt a third and still shorter flight; but if a grove be near, or a single tree, or even a tuft of bushes, he will take to one or the other—in the hope of hiding himself from his relentless pursuers.

He will either fly up into the tree, or bury his body

among the bushes. If it be a tall tree, he will not succeed in getting a safe roost : for he is already too fatigued, and, being a *pecan-fed* gobbler, too fat for this last exertion. In all likelihood he will stick his head into a thick bush or tussock of long grass—where the dogs will soon “cook his goose” for him, although he be a turkey gobbler.

As, during our journey towards the *pecan prairie*, I had been theoretically initiated into the mysteries of this peculiar chase, I determined, after arriving on the ground, to play my part without reference to any guidance from my companions : for it frequently happens that a flock of turkeys after being once “scared up,” fly in different directions, leaving each hunter a choice as to the bird or birds he may follow—the dogs being necessarily permitted to make a similar selection.

As it chanced on that particular occasion, our turkey-hunt turned out an affair of the scattering kind—at least, mine did—carrying me so far away from my companions, that I not only lost sight of them, but my way as well ; and came precious near sustaining the loss of something more important than either—*my scalp* !

Almost the instant after entering among the islands of timber, we discovered a gang of gobblers. They were not all *gobblers*, correctly speaking : for the flock was a promiscuous one—comprising old and young birds, as well as male and female. They were in the very situation desired by the hunters : that is far out upon the open prairie, where they could not easily retreat to the heavy timber, without giving us a long chase, plenty of sport, and probably one or two captures. They were “grazing” along the edge of a little grove or coppice—which my companions could easily identify as composed of *pecan*-trees—the nuts of which, no doubt, had attracted them to the place.

By good fortune a series of similar "islands," forming a sort of *archipelago*, extended from the point where we first came in sight of the turkeys, to that beside which they were picking up the *pecan*-nuts.

By keeping the copses between ourselves and the birds, we succeeded in stealing up behind that which was nearest them ; and then suddenly plying the spur, and raising the "hue and cry," we broke around the cover, and went towards them at full gallop, the hounds harking-forward among the hoofs of our horses.

As to be expected, the birds whirled upward into the air ; but not all together. Neither did they fly in one direction. They had been somewhat scattered over the *pasture* ; and the suddenness of our onslaught caused a still further separation of their cohorts, which flew off in bands of two and three together, taking different directions—some of them, being, perhaps, more scared than the rest, going away alone.

The hunters, as if taking their cue from this sudden distribution of the game, became separated in like manner—the hounds also scattering into couples as the chase proceeded.

For an instant or two I was nonplussed : not knowing which party to follow ; but, seeing what I believed to be the biggest gobbler of the gang flying over the *pecan* copse in a backward direction, and reckoning from his ponderous appearance that his flight would not be a protracted one, I wheeled my horse, and galloped under and after him.

There were none of the dogs going my way ; but I had been told that this was of no great importance. A good horse will easily *run down* this sort of game ; and the hounds are only useful when it comes to the *finale* of the chase, and the turkey is to be "grupped." Then the

dismounted horseman is in danger of losing his bird, by the latter taking a foul start, and so escaping him.

Determined, should I succeed in running down my turkey, to take precautions against this, I lanced my horse's flanks and rode on.

Unfortunately, it was not my own horse's flanks I was lacerating, or the chase would not have continued so long. To save my precious steed, I was astride of a horse furnished to me by my host—a stout Mexican mustang, which, although by no means an indifferent mount, was nothing to the splendid Arab I had left in contiguity with the maize-trough of the planter.

I urged the animal forward with all the speed that lay in his lithe sinewy limbs ; and after less than a half-mile made over the verdant turf of the prairie, I had the satisfaction to see the gobbler drop suddenly down upon the grass, and continue his *flight* upon his long red legs.

I was scarcely three hundred yards behind him, as he touched the ground. This the mustang soon reduced to a tenth part of the distance ; when the old cock, perceiving himself in danger of being caught, once more whirled up towards the sky.

This second “spring” did not exceed a couple of hundred paces ; and his coming down so soon convinced me, that the “balance” of the pursuit would be a trial between the legs of the turkey and the limbs of the mustang.

This conviction turned out to be well founded ; and on we went over the prairie, with all the speed that bird and beast were capable of commanding.

For the first half-mile or so I saw that I was gaining upon the gobbler—not rapidly ; for the mustang, though tough, was far from being a fast one. He promised bottom, however ; and I was indulging in high hopes that

in time I should overtake the turkey, and carry him back a prize, a triumph in the eyes of my hunting companions.

All at once this agreeable prospect began to appear doubtful. Although I continued to press the mustang, both with spurs and voice, I still perceived that the distance between me and the turkey was gradually growing greater, instead of less!

Surely the horse had not slackened his speed? I had guarded against that. The gobbler, then, must have quickened his.

What was the explanation?

I soon discovered it. I saw that the chase was carrying me up a hill.

A sharp ridge trended across the prairie, transversely to the line of the pursuit. Both pursued and pursuer had parted from the level plain, and were now gliding up the acclivity.

I knew the meaning of this. I remembered a chapter of my ornithology, studied among the pine barrens of Tennessee, where I had observed a turkey gobbler distance the hounds against the steep slope of a ridge; and do it with perfect ease. I knew that the bird, aided by its extended wings, could run against the hill with almost double the speed of either dog or horse; and that was the reason why my mustang was falling so far into the rear.

I kept on; but only to have my chagrin increased, by seeing the gobbler go much faster than myself.

He reached the crest of the ridge before my little steed, badly blown, had got half up its sloping side!

I was about to give up the chase in despair. The distance separating me from the turkey was at least two hundred yards; and I fancied that the mustang, winded

as he was, might be hurt in trying to overtake it. I did not desire to damage my reputation by "riding a free horse to death."

While thus hesitating, I was astonished by observing an unexpected circumstance. The turkey had reached the summit of the ridge, and was so conspicuously outlined against the blue background of the sky, that I could see it from head to heel. While admiring the outlines of the magnificent bird, I saw its wings all at once cease from their flapping, and drop down by its sides, while, at the same instant, the action of its limbs became suspended, and, as if having spent its last effort of strength, it tumbled over on the turf.

"Good!" thought I, "I've run it down, after all! What a fool I was to think of discontinuing the chase! There's nothing more to do but to ride up and take possession of it."

Lest the bird might recover breath, and make a new start, I once more drove my spurs into the sides of the mustang, and galloped up to the crest of the ridge.

I need not have been in such hot haste: for on getting near enough to the gobbler to be able to judge of his condition, I saw that he was dead!

"'Twas the pace that killed him!" I muttered to myself, gleefully adapting the old saw to the circumstance which was giving me so much gratification.

I lost no time in dismounting from my horse, with the design of taking possession of my prize.

As I approached the fallen gobbler, I stopped short to contemplate him.

A splendid creature he appeared, even in death. His plumage still gleamed with the iridescent hues of life—

just as at sunrise of that morning, when he had strutted his short hour over the prairie turf before the eyes of his coquettish female companions.

I was still occupied in this *post-mortem* examination, when I perceived that there was blood upon the beak of the bird—a tiny stream oozing out between its mandibles.

I was somewhat astonished by this singular circumstance—the effect of a simple chase. But I was a hundredfold more surprised on perceiving the true cause of the sanguinary extravasation, when I saw the feathered end of an arrow protruding out from under the wing-coverts of the turkey.

I had scarcely time to reflect on this singular appearance, when I heard a “swishing” noise in the air above me.

I looked up. A looped cord was descending over my head, which the instant after had settled upon my shoulders. At the same instant a wild yelling filled my ears; and I saw running towards me a score of human forms, whose naked, bronze-coloured skins, clouted thighs, and vermillion faces, proclaimed them to be Indians.

I perceived at once that I had fallen into the hands of a party of Comanches—on the war-trail, too—as their scant dress and painted faces proclaimed.

They had been bivouacking on the other side of the ridge; and seeing only the turkey as it came upon the crest, some one of them had taken advantage of the pause which the bird had made on perceiving them, and sent an arrow into its side.

When I said just now that I had fallen into their hands, I spoke figuratively. It had not gone quite so far as that; though, had I been without the bowie-knife habitually carried in my belt, such most certainly would have

been my fate—and I should, perhaps, never have had an opportunity of recording this adventure.

But the keen blade proved my preserver. In an instant it was out of its sheath; and the lazzo that had fallen over my shoulders—and in another second of time would have entangled my arms—lay, with its loop cut open, idly trailing upon the grass.

I never took to the saddle with greater celerity; and if my mustang had been allowed to lag a little while ascending that prairie slope, he made amends for the delay in going down again.

He needed neither voice nor spur to urge him to his utmost speed. The sight of the Indians, to say nothing of their wild yelling—well understood, and dreaded, by the mustang—had given him an impetus that carried him across the plain like a streak of lightning.

Fortunately, the Indians were afoot, and I was not followed; but this knowledge did not hinder me from continuing my gallop until I had retraced the ground gone over in the turkey chase, and rejoined my friends—still engaged with the gobblers they had pursued in the opposite direction.

My report caused a sudden suspension of their sports—succeeded by a quick ride straight homeward.

By good fortune, a brace of the birds had been already secured, to grace the dinner-table on the following day, and upon which they appeared, their flavour not a little heightened by the spice of adventure that had come so near preventing their capture.

TRAPPED IN A TREE.

AMONG the many queer characters I have encountered in the shadow of the forest, or the sunshine of the prairie, I can remember none *queerer*, or more original, than Zebulon Stump—"Old Zeb. Stump," as he was familiarly known among his acquaintances.

"Kaintuck by birth and raisin'," as he used to describe himself, he was a hunter of the pure Daniel Boone breed. The chase was his sole calling; and he would have indignantly scouted the suggestion, that he ever followed it for mere amusement.

Though by no means of uncongenial disposition, he affected to hold all amateur hunters in a kind of lordly contempt; and his conversation with such was always of a condescending character. For all this, he was not averse to their company; especially that of the young gentlemen of the neighbourhood who chanced to be honoured with his acquaintance.

Being myself one of those who could lay claim to this privilege, I oft-times availed myself of it; and many of my hunting excursions were made in the companionship of Old Zeb. Stump. He was, in truth, my guide and in-

structor, as well as companion ; and initiated me into many mysteries of American woodcraft, in which I was at that time but little skilled.

To me one of the most insoluble of these mysteries was that of Old Zeb's own existence ; and I was acquainted with him for a considerable time before I could unravel the clue to it. He stood six feet in boots, fabricated out of the tanned skin of an alligator—into the ample tops of which were crowded the legs of a pair of coarse “copperas” trowsers ; while the only other garments upon his body were a doeskin shirt, and a “blanket-coat” that had once been green, but, like the leaves of the autumnal forest, had become changed to a sere and yellowish hue. A slouch “felt” shaded his cheeks from the sun ; though for this purpose it was not often needed : since it was only upon very rare occasions that Old Zeb strayed beyond the shadows of the “Timber.”

Where he lived, and how he supported himself, were to me the two points that chiefly required clearing up. In the tract of virgin forest, where I was in the habit of meeting him by appointment, there was neither house nor hut. So said the people of Grand Gulf (a small town upon the Mississippi in which I was sojourning). And yet Old Zeb had told me that in this forest region was his home

It was only after our acquaintance had ripened into a strong feeling of fellowship, that I became his guest ; and had the pleasure of spending an hour under his humble roof.

Humble I may truly designate it, since it consisted of the hollow trunk of a gigantic sycamore-tree, still strading and growing !

In this cavity Old Zeb found sufficient shelter for him-

self, his "squaw," as he termed Mrs. Stump (whose existence was now for the first time revealed to me), his *penates*, and, when the weather required it, for the tough old cob that carried him in his forest wanderings.

His household was no longer a puzzle; though there still remained the mystery of how he managed to maintain it.

A skilled hunter might easily procure sufficient food for himself and family; but even the hunter disdains a diet exclusively game. There was the coffee (to a strong cup of which I was myself made welcome); the "pone" of corn-bread; the corn itself necessary to the sustenance of the old horse; the muslin gown that shrouded the somewhat angular outlines of Mrs. Stump; with many other commodities that could not be procured by a rifle. Even the rifle itself required food not to be found in the forest.

Presuming on our friendly intimacy, I put the question:

"How do you make out to live? You don't appear to manufacture anything, nor do I see any signs of cultivation around your dwelling. How, then, do you support yourself?"

"Them keeps us—them thar," answered my host, pointing to a corner of his tree-cabin.

I looked in the direction indicated. The skins of several species of animals, among which I recognized those of the painter, 'possum, and 'coon, along with a haunch or two of recently-killed venison, met my glance.

"Oh! you traffic in these?"

"Jess so, stranger. Sells the skins to the storekeepers, an' the deer meat to anybody as 'll buy it."

"But I have never seen you in the town,"

"I never goes thar. I don't like them stinkin' store-keepers. They allers cheats me."

"Who, then, does the marketing for you?"

"The ole 'oman thar. She kin manage them counter-jumpers better'n I kin. Can't you, ole gurl?"

"Well, that I guess I can," replied the partner of Old Zeb's bosom, with an emphasis that left no doubt upon my mind that she believed herself to be speaking the truth.

I now recollected having more than once seen Mrs. Stump in the streets of Grand Gulf, on her marketing errands, and having dined at an hotel upon a haunch of buck of her especial providing. Still more, I remembered purchasing from her a brace of white-headed eagles (*falco-leucocephalus*), which this good lady had brought in from the forest, and which I had forwarded to the Zoological Society of London.

Old Zeb's shooting was something that to me at the time appeared marvellous. He could "bark" a squirrel among the tops of the tallest tree; or could equally kill it by sending his bullet through its eye. He used to boast, in a quiet way, that he never "spoilt a skin, though it war only that o' a contemptible sq'll."

But what interested me more than all was his tales of adventure, of most of which he was himself the hero. Many of these were well worthy of being recorded.

One I deemed of especial interest, partly from its own essential oddness, partly from the quaint queerness of the language in which it was related to me, and not a little from the fact of its hinging on a phenomenon, to which more than once I had myself been witness. I allude to the caving in, or breaking down of the banks of the Mississippi river, caused by the undermining influence of the

current; when large slips of land, often whole acres, thickly studded with gigantic trees, glide into the water, to be swished away with a violence equalling the vortex of Charybdis.

It was in connection with one of these land-slips that Old Zeb had met with the adventure in question, which came very near depriving him of his life, as it did of his liberty for a period of several days' duration.

Perhaps the narration had best be given in his own piquant *patois*; and I shall so set it forth, as nearly as I can transcribe it from the tablets of my memory.

I was indebted for the tale to a chance circumstance: for it was a rare thing in Old Zeb to volunteer a story, unless something turned up to suggest it.

We had killed a fine buck, which had run several hundred lengths of himself with the lead in his carcass, and had fallen within a few feet of the bank of the river.

While stopping to "gralloch the deer," Old Zeb looked around with a pointed expression, as he did so, exclaiming:

"Darn me! ef this ain't the place whar I war trapped in a tree! Dog-gone ef tain't! Thar's the very saplin' itself."

I looked at the "saplin'" to which my companion was pointing. It was a swamp cypress, of some thirty feet in girth, by at least a hundred and fifty in height.

"Trapped in a tree?" I echoed, with emphatic interest, perceiving that Old Zeb was upon the edge of some odd adventure.

Desirous of tempting him to the relation of it, I continued, "Trapped in a tree? How could that be, Mr. Stump, an old forester like you?"

"It did be, howsomedever," was the quaint reply of

my companion, "an' not so very long ago neyther ; only about three year. Ef ye'll sit down a bit, an' we may as well, since the sun's putty consid'able hellish het jest now, I'll tell ye all about it. An' I kin tell ye, for I hain't forgotten neery sarcumstance o' the hul thing. No, that I hain't, an' I'll lay odds, young feller, that ef you ever be as badly skeeart as I war then, you'll carry the recollex-shun o' that skeear till ye gets chucked into yur coffin—aye, that ye will !"

Old Zeb here paused ; but whether to reflect on what he was going to say next, or to give time for his last words to produce their due impression, I could not determine. I refrained from making rejoinder, knowing that I had now got him fairly over the edge of the adventure, and was safe enough to "have it out."

"Wal, kumrade, I war out arter deer, jest as you an' me are the day ; only it had got to be lateish—nigh sun-down i'deed—and I hadn't emptied my rifle the hul day. Fact is, I hadn't sot eye on a thing wuth a charge o' powder an' lead. I war afut ; an', as you know yerself, it are a good six mile from this to my shanty. I didn't like goin' home empy handed, 'specially as I knowed we war empy-housed at the time, an' the ole 'ooman wanted somethin' to get us a pound or two o' coffee an' sugar fixins. So I thort I shed stay all night i' the wuds, trustin' to gettin' a shot at a stray buck or a turkey-gobbler i' the urly daylight. I war jest in the spot whar we air now ; only it looked quite diff'rent then. The under scrub's been all burnt down, as you may see. Then the hul place about hyar war kivered wi' the tallest o' cane, an' so thick, a coon ked scace a worm'd his way through it.

"Wal, stranger, 'ithout makin' more ado, I tuk up my quarters for the night under that ere big cyprus. The

groun' war dampish, for thar had been a spell o' rain ; so I tuk out my bowie, an' cut me enuf o' the green cane to make me a sort o' a shake-down.

"It war comfitable enuf ; an' in the twinklin' o' a buck's tail I war sound asleep.

"I slep like a 'possum till the day war beginnin' to break ; an' then I awoke, or rayther, war awoke by the darndest noise as ever roused a fellar out o' his slumber. I heerd a skreekin', an' screamin', an' screevin', as ef all the saws in Massissippi war bein' sharpened 'ithin twenty yurds o' my ear.

"It all kim from overhead, from out the tops o' the cyprus.

"I warn't puzzled a bit by them thar sounds. I knowed it war the calling o' the baldy eagles : for it warn't the fust time I had listened to them thar.

" 'Thar's a neest,' sez I to myself, 'an' young uns too. Thet's why the birds is makin' such a dod-rotted rumpus.'

"Not that I cared much about a eagle's neest, nor the birds themselves neyther. But jess then I remembers somethin' my ole 'ooman hed tolt me. She hed heerd thet there war a rich Britisher staying at the hotel in Grand Gulf, who were offerin' no eend o' money to whomsoever ud git him a brace o' young baldy eagles."

"You were rightly informed : it was I who made the offer."

"Dog-gone it, wur it you ? Ef I'd know'd—but niver mind ; I kudn't a done diff'rent from what I did. Wal, strenger, in coorse I clomb the tree. It warn't so easy as you may s'pose. Thar war forty feet o' the stem 'ithout a branch, an' so smooth that a catamount kedn't a scaled it. I thort at first that the cyprus warn't climeable nohow ;

but jess then I seed a big fox grape-vine, that arter sprawl-in' up another tree clost by, left this un, an' then sloped off to the one whar the baldies hed thar neest. This war the very thing I wanted—a sort o' Jaykup's ladder—an' 'ithout wastin' a minute o' time, I speeled up the grape-vine.

“It warn't no joke neyther'. The darned thing wobbled about till I wur well nigh pitched back to the groun': an' there war a time when I thort seriously o' slippin' down agin.

“But then kim the thort o' the ole woman an' the empty house at hum, along wi' what she'd sayed about the Britisher an' his big purse; and bein' freshly narved by these recolleckshuns, I swarmed up the vine like a squ'll.

“Once upon the cyprus thar warn't no diffeequilty in reachin' the neest. There war plenty o' footin' among the top branches whar the birds had made thar eyeray.

“For all that it warn't so easy to get into the neest. There kedn't a been less than a waggon-load o' sticks in that thar construckshun, to say nothin' o' Spanish moss, an' the baldies' own droppins, an' all sorts o' bones belonging to both fish an' four-footed anymals. It tuk me nigh an hour to make a hole so that I ked get my head above the edge, and see what the neest contained.

“As I expected, thar war young 'uns in it, two o' them about half-feathered. All this time the ole birds had been abroad—as I supposed, lookin' up a breakfast for thar chicks.

“‘How darned disappointed they'll be!’ sez I to myself, when they gits back an' find that thar young 'uns have fled the neest—'ithout feathers!’

“I war too sure o' my game and too kewrious about the

young baldies, watchin' them as they cowered close together, hiss'n' and threatenin' me, to take notice o' anythin' besides.

"But I war roused out o' my rev'rie by feelin' the hat suddintly jirked up off o' my head, at the same time gettin' a scratch across the cheek, that sent the blood spurtin' all over my face. It wur the talons o' the she eagle as did it; while the ole cock, clost to her tail, kept skreekin' an' screamin' an' makin' a confusion o' noises, as if he had jess come custrut from the towers o' Babylon.

"I had grupped one o' the young baldies afore the old 'uns kim up. I needn't tell ye I war only too glad to let the durned thing go agen, an' duck my head under the edge o' the neest; whar I kep it, till the critters had got a sort o' tired threatenin' me, and guv up the attack.

"I needn't tell ye, neyther, thet I, too, hed gin up all thort o' takin' the young eagles. Arter the wound I'd received I war contented to leave 'em alone; an' not all the gold in the Britisher's purse ked then have bought that brace o' birds.

"I only waited to rekiver my composure; an' then I commenced makin' back tracks down the tree.

"I hed got 'bout halfway atween the baldies' neest an' the place whar the fox-grape tuk holt o' the cyprus, when I war stopped short by somethin' I heerd—a sound far more terrific than the screech o' the eagles.

"It war the creakin' and crashin' o' timber—along wi' that unairthly rumblin' such as ye may hear when the banks o' the great Massissippi be a cavin' in.

"It war that very thing itself. I kud see the trees that stood atween me an' the river, tumblin' an' tossin' about, an' then goin' wi' a grand swish an' a plunge into the fast flowin' current o' the stream. The cyprus itself shook as

if the wind war busy among its branches. I ked feel a suddint jirk upon it, an' then it righted agin, and stood steady as a rock. The eagles above me war screamin' wuss than ever, while I below war tremblin' like an aspin.

"I knowed well enuf what it all meant. I knowed that it war the bank o' the river cavin in; but knowin' this, didn't gie me any great satisfaction: since I war under the belief that in another minute the cyprus mout *cave in too*.

"I didn't stay the ten thousandth frakshun o' a minute. I hurried to git back to the groun; an' soon reached the place whar the grape-vine jeined on to the cyprus.

"There warn't no grape-vine to be seen. It war clur gone away.

"The tother tree to which its root had been elingin' war one o' them as had falled into the river, takin' the fox-grape along wi' it. It war that had gin the pluck I feelled when descendin' from the neest.

"I looked below. The river had changed its channel. Instead o' runnin' twenty yurds from the spot it war surgin' along clost to the bottom o' the cyprus. I seed that in another minnit the cyprus itself mout topple over into the stream, an' be whirled along, or swallowed in the frothin' water.

"For me to git to the ground was plainly impossible. I ked only do so by jumpin' forty foot in the clur, an' I knew that to do so wud a shivered my ole thigh-bones, tough as they mout be.

"I ked do nothin' but stay whar I war—nothin' but wait and watch—listenin' to the screamin' o' the eagles—as skeeart as myself—to the hoarse roarin' o' the angry waters, an' the crashin' o' the trees, as one arter another they fell victims to the underminin' influence o' the flood."

I had by this time become fascinated by the narrative. Old Zeb's thoughts, notwithstanding the *patois* in which they were expressed, had risen to the sublime ; and although he paused for some minutes, I made no attempt to interrupt his reflections, but in silence I waited for him to continue his tale.

"Wal, strenger, what do ye suppose I did next?" was the interrogation with which my ears were soon after saluted.

"Really, I cannot imagine," I replied, considerably surprised at Old Zeb's question, abrupt as it was unexpected.

"Wal ; ye don't suppose I kim down from the tree?"

"I don't see how you could."

"Neyther did I. I kedn't an' I didn't. I mout as well a tried to git down the purpendikler face o' the Chicasaw bluff, or the wall o' Lexin'ton Court-house. I seed I kedn't make a descent o' it no how, an' thurfore I guv it up, an' stayed whar I war, crosslegs on a branch o' the tree.

"It warn't the most comfutable kind o' seat, but I hed somethin' else than cushions to think o'. I didn't know the minnit I mout be shot out into the Massissippi ; an' as I never war much o' a swimmer—to say nothin' o' bein' smashed among the branches in fallin', I warn't over satisfied wi' my situation.

"As I ked do nothin' but stick it out, I stuck it out, keepin' to my seat like death to a dead nigger, only shiftin' a leetle now an' then to ease my achin' posteerors.

"In this unkomfutable condishun I passed the hul o' that day. Though there warn't an easy bone in my body, I had got to be a bit easier in my mind ; for on lookin' down at the river, I begun to believe that the cavin in had

kum to an eend, an' that the cyprus war goin' to keep its place.

"So far I felt komfited ; but this feelin' didn't last long. It war follered by the reflexshun that whether the tree war to stand or fall, I war equally a lost man.

"I knowd that I war beyond the reach o' human help. Nothin' but chance ked fetch livin' critter within hearin' o' my voice. I seed the river plain enuf, an' boats mout be passin' up an' down—both steam an' flat—but I knowed that both was 'customed to steer along the opposite shore, to 'void the dang'rous eddy as sets torst the side I war on. The river, as ye see, young feller, are moren' a mile wide at this place. The people on a passin' boat wudn't hear me ; an' if they did, they'd take it for some one a mockin' o' them. A man hailin' a boat from the top o' a cyprus tree ! I knowd it 'ud be no use.

"For all that I made trial o' it. Boats did come past, o' all kinds as navigate the Massissippi ; steamers, keel-boats, an' flats. I hailed them all—hailed till I was hoarse. They must a heerd me. I'm sartain some o' em did, for I war answered by shouts o' scornful laughter. My own shouts o' despair mout a been mistuk for the cries o' a mocker or a madman."

The hunter once more paused in his narrative, as if overpowered by the remembrance of those moments of misery. I remained silent as before—as before struck with the sublimity of thought, to which the backwoodsman was unconsciously giving speech.

Observing my silence he resumed his narration.

"Wal, strenger ; I kim to the konclusion that I war *trapped in that tree*, an' no mistake. I seed no more chance o' gettin' clur than kud a bar wi' a two ton log across the small o' his back. The only hope I hed war

that the ole ooman 'ud be arter me, as she usooally is whensoever I'm missin' for a spell. But that moutn't be for a single night, nor two on 'em in succession. Beside, what chance o' her findin' me in a track o' timmer twenty mile in sarcumference? That hope war only 'vanescent, an' soon died out 'ithin me.

"It war just arter I had gin up all hope o' being suckered by anybody else, that I begun to think o' doin' suthin' for myself. I needed to do suthin'. Full thirty hours hed passed since I'd eyther ate or drunk, for I'd been huntin' all the day before 'ithout doin' eyther. I war both hungry an' thusty—if anythin', sufferin' most from the last mentioned o' them two evils. I ked a swallered the muddiest water as ever war found in a puddle, an' neyther frogs nor tadpoles would a deterred me. As to eatin', when I thort o' that, I kudn't help runnin' my eyes up'ards; an' spite o' the spurt I'd hed wi' thar parents I ked a' told them young baldies that thur lives war in danger.

"Possible, I mout a feeled hungrier an' thustier than I did, if it hedn't been for the fear I war in, 'bout the cyprus topplin' over into the river. That hed kep me in sich a state o' skeecar as to hinder me from thinkin' o' moust anythin' else. As the time passed, hows'ever, an' the tree still kep its purpendicklar, I begun to b'lieve that the bank warn't agoin to move any more. I ked see the water down below, through the branches o' the cyprus, an' tho' it war clost by, thar 'peared to be a clanjamfery o' big roott stickin' out from the bank, as war like to keep the dir firm agin the underminin' o' the current—leastwise for a good spell.

"Soon as I bekum satersfied o' this, I feeled easier; an once more tuk to thinkin' how I war to get down. Jess

as afore, the thinkin' warn't to no purpiss. Thar war no way but to jump it, an' I mout as well ha' thort o' jumpin' from the top o' a 'piscopy church steeple 'ithout gettin' squashed. I gin the thing up in shur despurashun.

"By this time it hed got to be night ; an' as thar warn't no use o' my makin' things wuss than they war, I looked about the cyprus to see ef thar war any limb softer than another, whar I ked lay my karkiss for a snoose.

"I found a place in one o' the forks large enuf to lodge a full growd bar. Thar I squatted.

"I slep putty well, considerin' thet the scratch the eagle had gin me had got to be soreish, an' war wuss torst the mornin'. Beside, I warn't quite easy in my mind 'bout the cavin in o' the bank ; an' more'n once I woke wi' a start thinkin' I war being switched into the river. Nothin' partickler happened till peep o' day, an' nothin' very partickler then, 'ceptin' that I feeled hungry enuf to eat a raw skunk. Jess at that minnit the young baldies war in bad kumpny. While I war thinkin' o' climbin' up to the neest an' ringin' one o' thar necks, I chanced to look out over the river. All at onest I see one o' them big water-hawks—*osparay* they call 'em—plunge down an' rise up agin wi' a catfish in his claws. He hadn't got twenty fut above the surface, when one o' the old baldies—the hen it war—went shootin' torst him like a streak o' greased lightnin'. Afore he ked a counted six, I seed the she baldy comin' torst the tree wi' the catfish in *her* claws.

" 'Good,' sez I to myself, 'ef I must make my breakfast on the raw, I'd rayther it shed be fish than squab eagle.'

"I started for the neest. This time I tuk the purcaushun to unsheath my bowie, and carry it in my hand ready for a fight ; an' it warnt no idle purcaushun as it proved, for scace hed I got my head above the edge o

the neest, when both the ole birds attackted me jess as before.

"The fight war now more evenly atween us; an' the cunnin' critters appeared to know it, for they kep' well out o' reach o' the bowie, though floppin' an' clawin' at me whenever they seed a chance. I gin the ole hen a prod thet cooled her courage considrable; an' as for the cock, he warn't a sarcumstance to her, for, as you knows, young feller, *the cock o' eagles is allers the hen bird*.

"The fish war lyin' in the bottom o' the neest whar the hen had dropped it. It hadn't been touched, 'ceptin' by' her claws whar she had carried it; and the young 'uns war too much skeeart durin' the skrimmage to think o' thar breakfast.

"I spiked the catfish on the blade o' my bowie, an' drawin' it torst me, I slid back down the tree to the fork whar I had passed the night. Thar I ate it."

"Raw?"

"Jess as it kum from the river. I mout a gin it a sort o' a cookin' ef I'd liked; for I hed my punk pouch wi' me, an' I ked a got firin' from the dead bark o' the cyprus. But I war too hungry to wait, an' I ate it raw. The fish war a kupple o' pound weight; an' I left nothin' o' it but the bones, fins, an' tail. The guts I gin to the young eagles, for a purpose I hed jess then.

"As ye may guess, I warn't hungry any longer, but thar kumd upon me a spell o' the durndest thust I ever sperienced in all my life. The fish meat made it wuss, for arter I had swallowed it, I feeled as ef my inside war afire. It war like a pile o' hickery sticks burnin' in my belly, an' bleezin' up through my breast and jugglers. The sun war shinin' full upon the river, an' the glitterin'

o' the water made things wuss, for it made me hanker arter it, an' crave it all the more.

"Onest or twice I got out o' the fork, thinkin' I ked creep along a limb an' drop down into the river. I shed a done so hed it been near enuf, tho' I knowd I ked niver a swum ashore. But I seed the water war too far off, an' I hed to gie the idee up an' go back to my den.

"Twar o' no use chawin' the twigs o' the cyprus. They war full o' rozin, an' 'ud only make the chokin' worse. Thar war some green leaves o' the fox-grape vine, an' I chawed all o' them I ked lay my claws on. It dud some good; but my sufferins war a'most unbarable.

"How war I to get at the water o' that river, that flowed so tauntinly jess out o' reach? That war the queery that nixt occerpied me.

"I 'most jumped off o' the tree when at last I bethort me o' a way; for I did bethink me o' one.

"I hed a piece o' string I allers carries about me. 'Twar quite long enuf to reach the river bank, an' let it down into the water. I ked empy my powder-horn and let it down. It wud fill, an' I ked then draw it up agin. Hooray!—

"I shouted that hooray only onest. On lookin' for the horn I diskivered thet I hed left it on the ground, whar I hed tuk it off afore goin' to sleep under the cyprus.

"I warn't agoin' to be beat in that eazy way. Ef I had no vessel that wud draw water I hed my ole doeskin shirt. I ked let that down, soak it, an' pull it up agin'.

"No sooner sayed than done. The shirt war peeled off, gathered up into a clew, tied to the eend o' the string, an' chucked out'ard.

"It struck a branch o' the cyprus, an' fell short.

"I tried agin, an' agin, an' over agin. The durned thing still fell short several feet from the bank o' the river. It warn't any fault o' the cord. It war long enuf. It war the thick branches o' the cyprus that gin me no chance to make a clur cast. I tried till I got dead tired of failin'—till I seed the thing war impossible—an' then I gin it up.

"I shed a felt dreadful at failin' arter bein' so cock sure o' suckcess; but jess then I bethut me o' another plan for reachin' that preeceious flood. I've tolt ye 'bout my cuttin' a lot o' cane to make me a shake-down for sleepin' on. Thar it still war, right under me—a hul cord o' it.

"The sight o' the long tubes surgested a new idee, which I warn't long in puttin' to practice. Takin' the shirt out o' its loop, I made the string fast to the heft o' my bowie. I then shot the knife down among the cane, sendin' it wi' all my might, an' takin' care to keep the peint o' the blade down'ards. It warn't long afore I hed spiked up as much o' thet ere cane as wud a streetched twenty yurds into the river.

"It tuk more time to manafacter the machine I intended makin', which war a long tube as mout enable me to draw up the water o' the stream. Thar war no eend o' whittlin' an' punchin' out the joints, an' then splicin' the tubes one to the tother. But I knowd it war a case o' life or death; an' knowin' thet, I worked on constant as a ole gin-hoss.

"I war rewarded for my patience. I got my blow-gun completed, an' shovin' it carefully out, takin' the percaushun to gie it a double rest upon the branches, I hed the saterfaction to see its peint dippin' down into the river.

"My mouth war applied to the other eend, an' oh, golly! Thar warn't no mint julep ever sucked through a

straw, as tasted like the flood that kim gurglin' up through that ere cane. I thort I ked niver take the thing from my lips, an' I feel putty sartin thet while I war drinkin', the Massissippi must a fell a kupple o' feet in the clur."

"Ha ! ha ! ha !"

"Ye may larf, young fellar, an' I'm glad to see ye in sech good spirits ; but ye ant so elevated as I war. When I tuk my mouth from the cane, I feeled all over a new man, jess as ef I hed been raised from the dead, or dragged out o' a consoomin' fire.

"Wal, strenger, I haint yet got to the eend o' my story—I s'pose you wish to hear the hul on it?"

"By all means—let me hear the *finale*."

"I don't know what ye mean by the finalley, but I'll gie ye the wind-up o' the affair ; which preehaps are the most kewrious part o' it.

"I lived in the fork of thet ere cyprus for six long days, occasionally payin' a visit to the eagles' neest, an' robbin' the young baldies o' the food thar parents hed purvided for them. Thar diet war various, consistin' o' fish, flesh, an' fowl, an' o' a konsequence so war mine. I hed all three for a change ; sometimes a rabbit, sometimes a squrel, with game to foller, sech as partridge, teal, an' widgeon. I didn't cook' em at all. I war afraid o' settin' fire to the withered leaves o' the tree, an' burnin' up the neest—which wud a been like killin' the goose as laid the eggs o' gold.

"I mout a managed that sort o' existence for a longer spell, tho' I acknowledge it war tiresome enuf. But it warn't that as made me anxious to gie up, but suthin' very diff'rent. I seed that the young baldies war every day gettin' bigger. Thar feathers war comin' out all over

an' I ked tell that it wudn't be long till they'd take wing.

"When that time arrove whar shed I be? Still in the tree ov coorse; but whar war my purvision to cum from? Who wud supply me wi' fish an' flesh an' fowl, as the eagles had done? Clurly ne'er a one. It war this thort as made me uneezy. I knew it war not likely I shed ever be diskivered now, since my ole 'ooman hedn't made her appearance sooner; an' as to any boat stoppin' for my hail, thet trick I hed tried till I war a'most brokenwinded—leastwise I hed kep' hollerin' every hour day arter day, till my thrapple war as sore as a blister.

"I seed clarly thet I must do suthin' to get down out o' that tree, or die among its branches, an' I spent all my spare time in thinkin' what *mout* be did. I used to read in Webster's spellin' book that 'needcessity are the mother o' invenshun.' I reckon old Web warn't fur astray when he prented them ere words—anyways it proved true in the case o' Zeb Stump, at the time he war stuck up in that cyprus.

"I hed noticed thet the two ole eagles bekim tamer and tamer as they got used to me. They seed thet I did no harm to thar chicks, 'ceptin' so far as to abstrack from them a portion o' thar daily allowance; but I allers took care to leave them sufficient for themselves, an' as thar parents appeared to hev no diffeequilty in purvidin' them wi' plenty—unlike many parents in your country, as I've heerd, strengere—my pilferins didn't seem much to distress them.

"They grew at last thet they'd sit on the one side o' the neest, while I war peepin' over the other!

"I seed thet I ked easily snare them, an' I made up my mind to do thet very thing: for a purtickler purpus thet

kumm'd into my head, an' which promised to extercate me out o' the ugly scrape I hed so foolichly got into.

"Wal, strenger, my idee war this. I hed noticed thet the eagles war both big birds, an' strong i' the wing. Everybody knows thet much. It thurfore occurred to me that I mout make them wings do me a sarvice,—otherways thet they *mout carry me out o' the tree*.

"In coorse I didn't intend they shed take me up i' the air. There warn't much danger o' that. I only thort they mout sarve to break my fall like one o' them things, *parry-shoots* I b'lieve they call 'em, an' the which I myself had seed onest in Noo Orleans, sent up into the air wi' a cat and a coon in it.

"Arter I'd got my plan tol'ably well traced out, I sot about trappin' the old eagles.

"In less 'n an hour's time I hed both o' 'em in my keepin', wi' thar beaks spliced to keep 'em from bitin' me, an' thar claws cropped clur off wi' my bowie.

"I then strengthened the cord I hed used to draw up the canes, by doublin' it half a dozen times; until it war stout enuf to carry my weight. One eend o' it I looped round the legs o' the eagles, gatherin' all four into a bunch, whilst the other eend I made fast around my own karkiss, jess under the armpits.

"I did all this upon the lowest limb o' the cyprus, whar I had fetched down the eagles.

"When all war ready, I drew my bowie from its sheath, and with its sharp point I pricked both the baldies at the same time, so as to set them a-floppin. As soon as I seed thar four wings in full play, I slid off o' the branch, directin' myself torst the groun' underneath.

"I ant very sartin as to what follered. I only recollex bein' dragged through the branches o' the cyprus, an' the

minnit arter plungin' *cochuck* into the waters o' the Massissippi. I shed most sartinly a been drowned ef that ere cord had broken, or the eagles had got loose. As it war, the birds kep' beatin' the water wi' thar big wings, and in thet way hindered Zeb Stump from goin' under.

"I've heerd o' a woman they called Veenis bein' drawed through the sea by a kupple o' swans; but I don't b'lieve they kud a drawed her at a quicker rate o' speed than I war carried over the buzum o' the Massissippi. In less than five minnits from the time I hed dropped out o' the tree, I seed myself in the middle o' the river and still scufflin' on. I seed that the baldies war boun' for the Arkansaw shore, an' knowin' that my life depended on thar reachin' it, I offered no opposition to thar efforts, but lay still an' allowed them to continue thar career.

"As good luck wud hev it, they had strength enuf left to complete the crossin'; an' thar war another bit o' good luck in the Arkansaw bank bein' on a level wi' the surface o' the water; so that in five minnits arter, I foun' myself among the bushes, the baldies still flutterin' about me, as ef determined to carry me on over the great parairas o' the West.

"I feeled that it war time to stop the steam, an' take in sail; so clutchin' holt o' a branch, I brought the baldies to anchor. I war all out o' breath, and it war some time afore I ked rekiver my legs, and release myself from my feathered kumpanyuns. I tuk good care not to let them go; though sartinly I owed them thet much for the sarvice they had done me. But jess then I bethort me o' the Britisher at Grand Gulf—ah! you it war, ye say, young feller?"

"Certainly. And those are the eagles I purchased from Mrs. Stump?"

"Them same birds, strenger. You shed a hed the young 'uns, but thar warn't no chance ever ag'in to clomb thet cyprus, an' what bekim o' the poor critters arterward, I haint the most distant idee. I reckon they ended thar days in the neest, which ye still see up thar; an' ef they did, I reckon the buzzarts wudn't be long in makin' a meal o' 'em."

With my eyes directed to the top of the tall cypress, and fixed upon a dark mass, resembling a stack of faggots, I listened to the concluding words of this queer chapter of "Backwoods Adventure."

THE BLACK JAGUAR:

AN ADVENTURE ON THE AMAZON.

It has been a contested point among naturalists, whether the black jaguar of America is merely a variety of the *felis onca*, or a distinct species. The best informed writers regard it in the former light; and, so far as my observation has extended, I can perceive no essential difference between the two varieties, either in size, shape, or habits. They appear to be distinguished by colour alone.

Every one knows the colour of the common jaguar—a glossy yellowish ground, turning paler, almost whitish, under the belly and throat, and mottled all over by what appear to be jet black spots, but which, on closer inspection, turn out to be irregular rings, each with a black blotch in the centre, forming a species of marking which may very properly be termed a rosette. It is this central spot of the ring that chiefly distinguishes the markings of the jaguar from those of the leopard and panther of the Old World—these having the ring, but not the dab in the centre.

Among the *felidæ* of the second class, as regards size—

that is, those next in size to the lion and tiger—there are five spotted species, quite distinct from one another, although they are usually spoken of under the common appellation of panthers or leopards. Four of these belong to the Old World—the true leopard, panther, the cheetah, or hunting leopard, and the ounce. The first two are very much alike, and can be distinguished from one another only by the skilled zoologist. The leopard is an inhabitant of the warmer countries of both Asia and Africa, while, as far as I can ascertain, the panther is found only in Southern Asia and the great Indian islands. The cheetah, easily identified by its shape as well as markings, its black spots being without the rings, is distributed over a vast range, comprising the whole continent of Africa, with a large portion of that of Asia.

The fourth of the great spotted cats of the Old World is the least known. Buffon procured a single skin, and gave to the animal the appellation of the “ounce;” but his description is worthless, and his knowledge is confined to the expression of a belief that it came from some eastern country—perhaps Persia. Since the time of the French naturalist the “ounce” has been a mystery; and although stuffed skins may be seen in many museums, no one appears to know whence they have been procured, or anything of the habits of the animal from which they have been stripped. But this uncertainty need continue no longer. Beyond doubt, the ounce of Buffon is the white leopard of the Himalayas, of late years often met with by Anglo-Indian hunters amongst the highest summits of those mountains, and rarely descending far below the line of the snow.

The jaguar, though often confounded with the leopard and panther of the Old World, is an entirely distinct

animal, exclusively confined to America, and found there only in countries of a tropical or sub-tropical character. It is in the hottest tropical regions where this creature attains to its greatest perfection, in the size and strength of its body, and the fierceness of its disposition.

Buffon, who had a keen antipathy to everything American, describes the jaguar as an innocuous creature of inferior dimensions ; but indeed this writer, whom the French love to designate as "a great naturalist," was little else than a verbose compiler, and his knowledge of natural history would scarcely exceed that of many a schoolboy of the present day.

Humboldt more correctly characterizes the jaguars, when he states that he has seen specimens which, in point of size, equal the royal tiger of India ; and another distinguished naturalist, Von Tschudi, has given the measurements of one, made by himself on the spot where it was killed, in one of the Peruvian valleys, and which goes far towards confirming the statements of the great scientific traveller.

I have never myself met with a specimen of the jaguar equalling the tiger of India in size, but more than one have I seen as large as the tigress ; and I believe the true state of the case to be this :—The largest jaguars are about equal in size to the smallest tigers.

As regards fierceness of disposition, and the danger to be apprehended from an encounter with them, they are indeed the rivals of either the tiger or lion of the Old World ; and the disbelief in this, often expressed by flip-pant writers who have never set foot in a South American forest, is simply an impertinent absurdity. Hundreds of human beings dwelling upon the banks of the Amazon, the Oronoco, the Magdalena, and other large tropical rivers, have fallen victims to the savage instincts of these

carnivorous creatures ; and, in the eastern Andes of Peru, it is well-known that more than one village has been abandoned by its inhabitants, for no other reason than to avoid the danger of being devoured by the jaguars, which like the tigers of India, instead of diminishing in numbers, usually increase by the proximity of a settlement.

It is probable that there are several varieties of the jaguar, perhaps species, distinct from one another, as the leopards of the Old World are from the panthers.

But the black jaguar does not appear anything more than an accidental circumstance in the colouring, just as the "black panther of Java"—also found in Bengal—is but a darker variety of the panther itself.

And yet, taking the testimony of the native inhabitants of South America—Indians, Portuguese, and Spaniards—there would seem to exist something more than a mere accidental difference. All agree in stating that the black jaguar is fiercer, larger, and more powerful than the fulvous kind.

Perhaps fancy may have something to do in the formation of this opinion. The former is not only far less numerous than the latter, but in most parts it is a scarce and rarely seen animal. Its habits, therefore, have been less observed. Fancy ever delights to attribute rare and wonderful qualities to that which is but little known. This may account for the peculiarities described as belonging to the black jaguar.

The nomenclature of the natives shows that, notwithstanding the difference of colour, they in reality regard these animals as being of one and the same species. "Tiger" and "black tiger," are their respective appellations in Spanish America, while the Indians of the Lower Andes know both as the "chinca," but distinguish them

by the terms "yana chinca," and "chaque chinca," that is black and spotted "chincas." Also in the "Lingoa Geral" they are respectively termed "jauarite" and "jauarite pixuna." This marking of the relationship between two animals by the natives of a country where these animals are found, is pretty generally a safe guide to the naturalist ; more particularly in a country of savage hunters, whose whole lives are spent in the pursuit and consequent observation of these creatures.

We may assume, therefore, that the black jaguar is no more than an accidental variety of the species. In fact, if you suppose the yellow or ground colour of the spotted kind to be deepened to a maroon brown, you will have the black jaguar itself ; for the latter is not black, as its name would imply, but of a dark chocolate colour. The ocellæ or rosettes are thickly studded over its body just as upon the fulvous kinds, and these marks, although not visible to the superficial observer, can easily be distinguished when the animal stands in a certain light.

An incident which occurred to me some years ago, in which a black jaguar played a prominent part, proved that this creature, whether or not it be different in species from its yellow congeners, is at least their equal in boldness and ferocity of disposition.

I had gone up the Amazon to the Brazilian settlement of Barra, at the mouth of the Rio Negro ; and having accomplished the mission of my visit to that curious locality, I was desirous of returning again to Gran Para. There was no way of getting back but by taking passage on one of the trading vessels of the river ; and on one of those which chanced to be going down to Para, I embarked.

The craft was one peculiar to the Lower Amazon, and

known as an "Igarite." It had one mast amidships, with a lug sail, and was flat-bottomed, without keel. The cabin was nothing more than a "toldo"—an arched roof, thatched with leaves of the *bossu* palm, and covering all the afterpart of the vessel, except a small space for the steersman. A similar taldo was constructed over the forward half of the igarite, where much of the cargo was stowed; but as this consisted entirely of *manteiga* (turtle oil), carried in large earthen *botijas* of Indian manufacture, the weather could not injure it; and every available space was crowded with the jars. Just enough room was left for four oarsmen, the captain of the craft (Joao, by name), and myself.

I have been thus particular in describing the igarite and its crew, as it has something to do with the adventure I am about to relate.

About half way between Barra and the island of Marajo, we had got into a somewhat narrow channel between two islets. The wind was blowing up stream, and was therefore against us; but as there was a fair current, we were making a headway of about two or three miles an hour. It was about mid-day, and the sun over our heads was so intensely hot, that the captain had ordered the "tapinos" to desist from rowing.

The sail was down, and the igarite floated with the current. The crew, sheltering their heads under the roof of the forward toldo, soon fell asleep; and I myself in the after cabin, was nearly in a similar condition. Joao, acting in the double capacity of captain and steersman, alone kept awake.

I had been lying for a considerable time without hearing any other sound than the rippling of the water against the sides of the igarite. Indeed, at that hour of the day

it is always more silent than at any other time. Notwithstanding the abundance of animal life in the tropical parts of South America, the traveller will see or hear but little signs of it during the hours of noon. The animals all go to sleep. Even the howling monkeys take their siesta, and the preying ounce, and other fierce creatures, overcome by the heat, seem to give their victims a respite. The beautiful snow white bell-bird is at this hour the only creature that cheers the solitude of the forest with its metallic monologue.

From my state of half-slumber I was awakened by the voice of Joao, which, in a sort of half-whisper, was heard repeating,—

“Seuho! seuho!”

I looked up; Joao's face was peeping in through an opening in the back of the toldo. There was an expression upon it that told me something was in the wind.

“Well, Joao, what is it?” I inquired.

“Is your gun loaded, seuho?”

“Yes,” I said, reaching forward and taking my double-barrelled piece from its rest—“what is it?”

“There's a queer-looking creature ahead—may be a tapin or a jacare (crocodile); I can't make it out—come and see, seuho,”

I crept forward to the entrance of the toldo, and looked in the direction pointed out by the captain, that is, down stream, and nearly ahead of our course.

There was a point of the island that jutted slightly into the water, and against this point a small raft had formed, consisting of dead logs, branches, and river wreck.

The raft was not extensive, nor did it appear to be very firmly attached to the bank; but the logs themselves were tree-trunks of the largest size, and evidently of some

light wood, as they floated high above the surface of the water.

On the top of one of them—that nearest the water's edge—a dark object was visible. It was plainly the body of some animal, but what sort it was, I could not tell, nor could Joao, as it lay stretched along the log.

There was a back, and shoulders, and a neck, head, and legs, too, that appeared to be grasping the trunk on which the animal lay extended. It could not be a piece of dark wood, nor yet a *jacare*. The outlines of the alligator I should have known at a glance.

"A tapin," thought I, as Joao had at first suggested; but no, it could not be. Its odd position on the floating log contradicted the supposition of its being a tapin. A capivara! not that either; and none of the species of black monkeys would have lodged themselves so singularly. Besides, it was larger than any of the monkey tribe of these parts.

I thought over every animal that I knew to inhabit the regions of the Amazon. I never once thought of its being a jaguar. Of course the yellow-spotted skin of this monarch of the American forest, I, as well as Joao, would have recognized at a glance.

Both of us gazing and guessing—the tapino still slept—Joao had for the moment forgotten his office of steersman, and we perceived that the igarite was drifting right on to the raft.

The pilot instantly seized the stern oar, and with a strong pull, headed the vessel so as to clear the timber.

We were now nearly opposite, and I at length procured a fair view of the creature that had been puzzling us. What was my astonishment—consternation, I may say—

on discovering its true character? Instead of being a harmless tapin, or cavy, as we had been guessing, it was no other than the dreaded *janarit pixuna*—the *black jaguar of the Amazon*.

My first thoughts were about my gun, which I held in my hand. A look at the weapon, and I saw that both barrels were empty!

I now remembered having drawn the charges that morning, for the purpose of wiping the barrels, and I had neglected to reload. It would be too late to do so now. A cold fear crept over me. Except some dull cutlasses for cutting brush, there was not another weapon on board. We were literally defenceless.

My gaze returned to the jaguar. He was asleep! His maroon-coloured body, almost as large as that of an Indian tiger, lay stretched along the raft, glistening in the sun—beautiful, but fearful to behold, especially from our point of view. The remains of a large fish, half devoured, lay close by. No doubt he had caught it, satisfied his hunger, and, yielding to the heat of the noon-day sun, had gone to sleep.

These were after thoughts of mine. I was in no humour for reflections at the time. I only noticed, and with some satisfaction, that the fierce creature slept.

Not a word had as yet passed between myself and Joao—a sign only—and that was mutually, to enjoin silence. The captain saw that my gun was empty, and knew as well as I did the danger we had to dread. He knew well that should the jaguar awake, its first act might be to spring upon the igarite and attack us.

It was no groundless fear—such things had happened before—aye, even out into the mid-river, the jaguar had been known to swim, attack the passing canoe, and drag

its occupant overboard ! This, too, in the case of a jaguar of the ordinary size and sort—but a *black jaguar*, one of monstrous dimensions !

Joao knew the danger. He stood like a statue firmly grasping the handle of his oar.

A few seconds only elapsed until the igarite was opposite the raft, almost touching it. Now was the critical moment.

The tapinos still slept. Would they awake ?

I cast a hurried glance at them. They lay like bronze images in the bottom of the boat in different attitudes ; I could hear their breathing. Mine and Joao's could not have been heard—we scarcely breathed.

A word—a motion and we are lost ! There is neither.

We glide gently on ; the dreaded sleeper hears us not. How close !—I could almost touch its glossy hide with the muzzle of my gun ! Softly, softly. Ha !

“ See ! ” whispered Joao, “ see, master ! the raft comes away—it follows us—*Santissima !* ”

I saw it as soon as Joao, but could scarcely believe my eyes. The part of the raft upon which lay the jaguar, had become detached—no doubt by the swell caused by the passage of the igarite, and was now drifting down the current. It had parted so silently that not a crackle had been made among the logs, and the sleeper was not disturbed. The animal lay upon the floating mass perfectly unconscious of the change in its position ; and yet it was difficult to believe that its fierce nature could be stilled into such a profound slumber.

It was not likely it would long continue in this unconscious condition, and as the log on which it lay was carried by the current in the same direction as ourselves, and at the like rate of speed, the distance between it and

us, and consequently our danger continued the same as ever.

Awaking at any moment, it might have sprung right into the igarite, where it would have had us completely at its mercy.

It is not necessary to detail the terrible emotions that passed through the mind of Joao and myself, while under the convoy of that dread *compagnon du voyage*. The tapinos, still asleep, were spared them, and no doubt, I myself would have felt them more keenly had I not been occupied in the loading of my gun.

In this, also, Joao assisted me, and the process was as gentle and silent as if the gun had been glass, and we were afraid of breaking it.

Fortunately we had succeeded in getting both barrels charged before the event, which we had been momentarily expecting, came to pass—the awakening of the jaguar.

It did come to pass, not from any noise proceeding from the igarite, for there had been none, but by a disturbance in the water, close to the log on which the sleeper was extended.

It was a porpoise that caused this disturbance, rising to the surface to blow.

The jaguar started to its feet, causing the log to wriggle unsteadily as it stood up. For a moment, even its fierce nature seemed to undergo a shock of surprise, at the odd situation in which it so unexpectedly perceived itself to be.

In a short moment, however, its surprise gave place to the fiercest fury, seeing human forms so near it, and no doubt believing us the cause of its involuntary voyage. Uttering its wild cat-like screams, and lashing its long tail against its flanks, it cowered along the log, gathering its

four feet together, evidently with the intention of launching itself towards the igarite.

As it couched to make the spring, with its horrid round head flattened against the trunk of the tree, it could not have offered a fairer aim, and knowing it would not long continue in this attitude, I lost not an instant in taking aim. I fired two bullets in as quick succession as I could pull the two triggers, and fortunately, with fatal effect, for on the smoke drifting aside, we had the satisfaction to see no jaguar, but the trunk of a tree bobbing about in the midst of a disc of blood-stained water.

The beast had gone dead to the bottom, and the tapinos, who sprang up in affright from their recumbent attitudes, had only this evidence with the words of Joao and myself, of the danger from which they had so unconsciously escaped.

THE END

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